

The Lord is My Shepherd
Psalm 23:1a
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Tonight I do want to begin a series, and I don't know exactly how long the series is going to be, on Psalm 23, but I know there are a lot of really, there is a lot of richness here, a lot of things that we need to learn about our God and about His relationship to us. There's a story that I've shared with you, I know, before because it's one of my favorite examples of someone who doesn't fully appreciate the value of something he has.

It was in the May 17, 1987 edition of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in which there was a fascinating story. Many years ago in the 1900's a rock hound named Rob Cutshaw owned a little roadside shop outside of Andrews, North Carolina. Like many in his trade, he hunted for rocks and then he sold the rocks that he found to collectors or to those who would make jewelry from them. He knew enough about the rocks that he searched for to decide which of them to pick up and to sell, but he certainly was no expert. He left the appraising of what he found to others.

As much as he enjoyed the work that he did in the little shop that he ran, it barely paid the bills. He occasionally moonlighted, cutting wood and other things, to help put bread on the table for himself and his family. One time while Rob was on a dig in North Carolina he found a rock that he later described as "purdy and big." He tried unsuccessfully to sell the specimen that he'd found and according to the Atlanta Constitution he kept the rock under his bed or in his closet for many years. He guessed that the blue chunk that he'd found could bring as much as 500 dollars if he could find the right buyer. But frankly, he would've taken much less if it came to paying his power bill. That's how close Rob Cutshaw came to selling, for a few hundred dollars, what turned out to be the largest, most valuable sapphire ever found. That "purdy, big" blue rock that Rob had abandoned in his closet for 20 years is now known as the Star of David sapphire. It weighs nearly a pound and it's worth more than 2.75 million dollars.

What really stands out to me about this story is here was a man who knew something of the value of what he had, but only in the most minuscule, to the most minuscule extent. He knew it had value, but he grossly underestimated its worth. I think we do exactly the same thing with some of the passages that we discover in our Bibles. In one sense we never come to fully appreciate any of the riches that are ours in the Scripture. We live and we die without a full apprehension of the wealth that the Scripture contains, and that is especially true when it comes to certain passages, and sadly I'm afraid it is uniquely true of those passages that are the most familiar to us.

Perhaps chief among the familiar but grossly underappreciated chapters in the Bible is the most familiar chapter in the Old Testament, Psalm 23. Derek Kidner, in his excellent little commentary on the Psalms, writes this, “Depth and strength underlie the simplicity of the Psalm. Its peace is not escape; its contentment is not complacency. There is a readiness to face deep darkness and imminent attack and the climax reveals a love which homes toward no material goal, but toward the Lord Himself.” Robert Davidson writes, “No other Psalm has had such a central place in the hearts of people of both sure and uncertain faith. That is, frankly, of both believers and unbelievers.” Charles Spurgeon called this Psalm, the Pearl of the Psalms. Alexander McLaren, commenting on Psalm 23, said, “It has dried many tears and supplied the mold into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith.”

But perhaps my favorite quote describing the beauty and richness of this Psalm comes from Henry Ward Beecher. It’s a long quote, but I want you to read it along with me. “David has left no sweeter Psalm than the short twenty third. This pilgrim,” meaning the Psalm itself, “God has sent to speak in every language on the globe. It has charmed more griefs to rest than all the philosophy of the world. It has remanded to their dungeon more felon thoughts, more black doubts, more thieving sorrows, than there are sands on the seashore. It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their griefs, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them. Ghastly hospitals have been illuminated. It has visited the prisoner and broken his chains. Nor is its work done, it will go singing to your children and my children and to their children through all the generations of time, nor will it fold its wings ‘til the last pilgrim is safe and time ended and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God whence it issued and sound on mingled with all those sounds of celestial joy which makes heaven musical forever.” Beecher is right, this is a truly amazing passage of Scripture.

This Psalm looks beyond the short life that we live here, through its difficult and dark valleys, and it looks into eternity future. It ends with the believer dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. This Psalm is truly a masterpiece of divine wisdom and of soothing, comforting grace. Let’s look at it together. The first question we have to ask and answer is, who is the author? Well, if you’ll notice in your Bibles the title of the Psalm identifies its author. It is a Psalm of David. The titles in the Psalms, or the small print that introduce the Psalms in our Bibles, those titles, those inscriptions, are ancient. In fact, these titles and technical terms are actually part of the canonical text of the Hebrew Bible. They are even included in the numbering of the verses. In addition, we know that the New Testament treats these headings as Scripture. In fact, our Lord Himself affirms their validity when He uses one of the headings in Mark 12 to ascribe a Psalm to David and the only way we know that Psalm was written by David is because of the inscription.

So we know then, based on the authority of the New Testament, that these titles can be embraced and believed, so David is the author of this great Psalm. Now, once you understand that he

wrote Psalm 23 it makes perfect sense why he would use the metaphor of a shepherd, you know, of course, that it was one with which he was very familiar. David spent his early years alone caring for his father's sheep. You can read about that in 1 Samuel 16 and 1 Samuel 17. So, naturally for him, this picture captures the goodness and the grace of God in the lives of all who belong to him.

Now, when and why did David write this Psalm? Well, there really are no definitive clues within the Psalm itself as to when or for what occasion David wrote. The two most frequent guesses by commentators are these, one, and this is a common view of many commentators, is that during the years in which David fled from Absalom in the wilderness he wrote this Psalm. He was wandering. He was like a sheep without a shepherd and he was reminding himself that God was his Shepherd. The other frequent guess is that this Psalm actually was written near the end of David's life when all was quiet and all was good and he's looking back as an old man on his life, and he's reflecting on what God did, and as he thinks about what God has done in his life he likens the paths God has led him on and the protection he's enjoyed to a shepherd tending his sheep. Both of those are, of course, possible, but we have no way to know for sure.

The truth is, I think it is the genius of the Holy Spirit to leave this Psalm disconnected from any specific occasion. The result is a powerful Psalm that universally applies. It applies to every Christian of every age on every occasion and in every life circumstance. It's amazing in its universal application to the human soul. Everybody here tonight, without exception, can find rest and peace and comfort and direction and grace in this Psalm.

Now, you'll notice there are no requests, no pleas. It is instead a Psalm of trust and confidence in God. In fact, notice in this Psalm David's three great affirmations of trust in God. The first was in verse 1, "I shall not want." The second one is the end of verse 4, "I will fear no evil," and the third one is at the end of verse 6, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He is affirming his trust, his confidence in God.

Let's read it together, very familiar words, but let me just encourage you as I read it and you read along with me, try to imagine for a moment that you had never read these words; try to read them as though you were reading them for the very first time. Let's read it together. This is what David wrote, now 3,000 years ago.

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul.
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

We can summarize the theme of this Psalm in this way, because Yahweh is our Shepherd King, He will always care for us. Because Yahweh is our Shepherd King, He will always care for us. David is completely confident of God's goodness, both in this life, "surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me all the days of my life," and forever, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Now, as we begin to take this Psalm apart, we have to ask ourselves, what's the structure here? There are a number of possible ways to understand the structure of this Psalm. In fact, this is a complicated Psalm. There is complexity beneath its apparent simplicity and there are a number of ways that people try to understand the flow of thought. There are two that seem most likely to me. The first is based on two metaphors. The first metaphor appears to be the Lord is our loving Shepherd, in verses 1 to 4. Here you have the Lord interested in caring for each sheep in unique circumstances. The second metaphor appears to be in verses 5 and 6, the Lord as our gracious host, setting a table before us in the presence of our enemies, preparing a lavish feast in which we celebrate with Him.

There's another way to understand this Psalm, though, and I frankly lean towards this one, and that is, there really is only one metaphor in this Psalm. As I will show you in a few minutes, and even more thoroughly when we get there, I do not believe that David changes metaphors in verses 5 and 6 from a shepherd to a gracious host. Instead, he is still developing the idea of God is our Shepherd and I'll explain why I believe that in just a few minutes. So there is really only one metaphor here, it is God as our Shepherd. So David begins the Psalm by defining the nature of our relationship with God, He is our Shepherd, and then the rest of the Psalm he explains the practical results, or the effects, of the fact that God is, in fact, our Shepherd.

Now with that structure in mind, here's how I've chosen to outline the Psalm. First of all, just the first line in the Psalm, I've entitled, How to Think About God, One Powerful Illustration of Our Relationship with Him. The second part of the outline or structure of this Psalm I've entitled, What to Expect From God, Six Practical Results of Our Relationship With Him, and that begins in the second half of verse 6 and runs, or the second half of verse 1 rather, and runs down through verse 6.

So let's look at what David has to teach us. His voice comes to us over 3,000 years and it's frankly as fresh today as it was the day he wrote it. Let's begin by looking at How to Think About God, One Powerful Illustration of Our Relationship with Him. The first line simply says,

“The LORD is my shepherd.” Every single word of that statement is crucial, and it frankly, I believe, is out of this one brief statement that the rest of the Psalm flows, and so I want to take it apart word by word.

First of all, I want you to notice that he says, “The LORD is my shepherd.” Our relationship with God is not with some generic being or some unnamed spiritual force. David’s God was not the God of the twelve-step program. He was not whomever or whatever you may conceive Him to be. His God was singular, unique, exclusive. In fact, He has a personal name, and that name is Yahweh, which is the Hebrew word that is translated LORD in all caps in this first verse. This is an interesting name. It is the most frequent designation for God in the Old Testament, the word Yahweh that occurs here in verse 1. It’s in all caps. In fact, it occurs over 6,000 times in our Old Testament text. Theologians call it the Tetragrammaton. Don’t be scared by that, that simply means four letters because God’s name, Yahweh, as it comes to us in the Scripture, it comes in four letters Y H W H. It is His personal name. It was probably pronounced something like I am trying to do tonight. Yahweh. I say probably because when the Hebrew was originally written there were no vowel pointings. All we had was consonants. The scribes came back later, long after it was written, and added the vowels, and so we can’t be absolutely sure how it was pronounced, but this is the best guess of scholars.

In most English translations, you say, how do I know when that sacred Tetragrammaton, when those four Hebrew letters that are God’s personal name, Yahweh, how do I know when those occur in my English Bible because it’s not there? The answer is, in most English translations it is translated LORD in the Old Testament in all caps, not capital L lowercase o r d, but whenever you come, as you see here in the first verse of Psalm 23, in most English translations, the word LORD is in all caps. When you find that word, that is translating Yahweh, that is translating God’s personal name, and as I said, it occurs over 6,000 times in the Old Testament.

This name is used in Genesis 9:26 after the flood, chapter 15 verse 2 the Abrahamic covenant reiterated there, but it’s full and complete revelation, all that it meant, was not known in the time of the patriarchs. The full meaning of this name was not made known until the time of Moses. Here’s what the Lord says in Exodus 6:3, “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name,” there it is, “LORD,” in all caps, “by My name, Yahweh, I did not make myself known to them.” So, what does it mean? What is God saying about Himself in this personal name?

Well, the answer comes in Exodus 3. Let’s turn back there together. Chapter 3 of Exodus, verse 1, “Now Moses was pastoring the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian.” This is the end of those 40 years in the wilderness; he’s now nearly 80 years old, “and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.” Now notice verse 2, this is key, “The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush.” Notice it is, “the angel of the LORD.” In Old Testament terms that is a Christophany, an

appearance of Jesus Christ, a pre-incarnate appearance of the second member of the Trinity, and he sees this bush that, “was burning with fire,” verse 2, “yet the bush was not consumed.” So Moses said, I have to see this, what’s going on here? Verse 4, now watch this, we just found that it’s in verse 2, “the angel of the LORD,” verse 4,

When the, [*There it is.*] When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. And [*here it is*] Yahweh said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people,” and “I have come [*verse eight*] to deliver them from the Egyptians.”

Now notice, God says,

“I’m going to send you, [*verse 10,*] to Pharaoh, and you’re going to bring my people out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” And He says, “I’m going to be with you,” [*and then here’s Moses’s response, verse 13,*] Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What’s His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This name, I AM, or I AM THAT I AM as he describes it in verse 14, describes God’s self-existence. It’s the third person form of the verb to be. Here in verse 14, when God says it it’s the first-person form, I am. When we say Yahweh we are not saying I am, we are saying He is. That’s what it means. He simply is. He is simply the One who is. God’s personal name, and by the way, you’ll notice down in verse 15, the end of the verse, He says, “This is My name forever, and this is my memorial-name to all generations.” He says this is how I want to be known, you want a name for Me? Here it is, Yahweh. When He says it, it means, I am. When we say it, and we say Yahweh, it means, He is.

God’s personal name simply means that He is responsible for all existence, including His own. He depends on nothing or no one for His existence. Geerhardus Voss writes, “The name Yahweh gives expression to the self-determination, the independence of God, that which we are accustomed to call His sovereignty.” “I simply am,” God says. Now, I love that later in the book of Exodus God defines Himself further. Turn over to Exodus 34. Who is this One who calls Himself I am, whom we say He is? What is He? Well, Moses asked God, notice chapter 33 of Exodus, verse 13, “If I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways.” Let me know Your predictable patterns of behavior.

Listen folks, God is the most predictable person in the universe. The gods of the nations are impulsive and unpredictable. God is utterly predictable. Moses says, I want to know Your predictable patterns of behavior, and he says, notice in verse 18, Moses said, “I pray, show me Your glory!” and so God says, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,” and then you know the revelation. Notice down in chapter 34, verse 6, “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed,” here it is, here’s God’s predictable patterns of behavior, here’s what He is, He first recites his name, “Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim, and I am compassionate,” I am full of pity for those who are in difficulty in trouble. “I am gracious,” I delight in showing goodness to those who deserve exactly the opposite. “I am slow to anger, I am abounding in steadfast love,” in loving loyalty and faithfulness. “I keep steadfast love for thousands, I forgive iniquity, transgression and sin,” and yet He makes sure that we understand that He doesn't take sin lightly, “yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.” Where I find sin, I will deal with it, God says, I am a God of absolute justice.

How is that reconciled, forgiving sin, leaving no sin unpunished? It’s reconciled folks, at the cross. But this is who He is. This is God’s self-portrait. Can I say this respectfully? This is God’s selfie. This is who He is. This is how He wants us to understand Him and this amazing Person is our Shepherd. Phillip Keller, in his book on the twenty third Psalm says, “David knew from first-hand experience that the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of man who owned it.” Think about that for a moment. Some men were gentle, kind, intelligent, brave, and selfless in their devotion to their flock. Under one man sheep would struggle, starve, and suffer endless hardship, while in another’s care they would flourish and thrive contentedly. It all depended on who your shepherd was. We know we will be cared for because Yahweh is our Shepherd and here He’s told us what He’s like.

But there’s one other thing you need to see here. Did you notice, back in Exodus 3, the Angel of the Lord said, “I am”? That means the second person of the Trinity was the One who identified Himself, and, of course, all three members of the trinity, as Yahweh. Keep that in your mind, that comes into play later.

Now, let’s go back to Psalm 23. We know, folks, that we will be amazingly cared for because our Shepherd is like what we just saw. This is who He is. But, I also want you to notice, “The LORD IS my shepherd.” Literally, the Hebrew text reads “Yahweh, my shepherd.” Although the verb of being translated is does not occur in the Hebrew text, all of our translations supply it and that’s not only because it just works better in English, but also because in the Hebrew mind they simply understood the verb of being to be there. So David is describing here a state of being that exactly corresponds to our English word is, so the Lord as my shepherd is both a current state of reality and it will continue to be a state of reality. I love this, think about this, Yahweh, that wonderful person that we just read about, is, right now, wherever I find myself, whatever my

circumstances, however hard life may appear and may actually be at this moment, He IS my shepherd.

He also says, “The Lord is MY shepherd.” In fact, it seems here that the emphasis falls on my. David’s point is that he not only enjoys a relationship with God as part of the nation that God had chosen, but his relationship with God is individual and personal. There was a tendency in Israel to speak about God only as our God. Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God,” and of course that’s true, but David here boldly declares that what is true of Israel in general is true of him specifically. Now, sadly, you and I have the same tendency that Old Testament Israel had, we are tempted to speak of our God, our Savior, our Lord. And again, that is true, and we do that because we’re part of a family; we’re part, as we were reminded this morning, of a larger group of people, but it is crucial that at the same time we remind ourselves that the Lord of the church is also the Lord of each one of us as individuals. The God who is the Father of all of His people is also the Father of each one of us individually.

Spurgeon writes, “David does not say the Lord is the shepherd of the world at large and leads forth the multitude as His flock, but, ‘The Lord is my shepherd.’ If He is a shepherd to no one else, He is a shepherd to me. He cares for me, watches over me, and preserves me, ‘The Lord is MY shepherd,’” and of course he finishes this sentence by saying, “‘The Lord is my SHEPHERD.’” Derek Kidner writes, “In the word shepherd David uses the most comprehensive and intimate metaphor yet encountered in the Psalms. The shepherd lives with his flock and is everything to it, its guide, its physician, and its protector.”

You know, when you think about this it’s really truly remarkable that David, and ultimately our Lord Himself, would have chosen to describe God as a shepherd, because in ancient Israel the work of shepherds was considered to be the lowest. We’ve talked about that before. So why exactly then did David use this image? There are three primary reasons. First of all, because the image of sheep best describes us, they are by nature utterly dependent. They can do nothing for themselves. Phillip Keller again, who grew up in East Africa surrounded by native herders and who, for eight years when he was younger, worked as a sheep owner and rancher, writes this, “Sheep do not just take care of themselves as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care.”

But the primary point in this Psalm is not what the sheep are unable to do, but what the shepherd actually does. So, there’s a second reason that he chooses this image; the image of a shepherd best describes God’s role in our lives. David chose this picture because, as he understood in a profoundly personal way, a shepherd is everything to his sheep. Sheep cannot survive without the constant presence and the constant care of the shepherd. He is always with them. He provides for their daily food and drink. He leads them on the safe and right paths. He heals their diseases. He protects them from all danger. And this is exactly what God has chosen to be to those who are His people.

But there's a third reason David chooses this image and that is, in the ancient world kings were often called the shepherds of their people. For example, the great Babylonian King Hammurabi was called, "the shepherd of the people." In the writings of Homer shepherd is used often as a royal title for kings and even within the Scripture it is used this way. Isaiah writes, in Isaiah 44:28, of Cyrus the Mead, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'she will be built.' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" This, by the way, is why the metrical version of Psalm 23 that's in our hymn book reads, "The King of love my Shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never."

Now, understanding this connection, this comes back to what I said at the beginning, understanding this connection makes the image of God as a royal host in verse 5 fit with that of a shepherd in the first four verses. It moves seamlessly between a shepherd in verses 1 to 4 and a shepherd king in verses 5 and 6. Why a shepherd king? Because it is a beautiful picture, the picture of a shepherd king describes one who is powerful and sovereign, but at the same time benevolent, kind, and caring to every individual citizen of his kingdom.

Now, that raises the question, to whom is God a shepherd? "The Lord is my shepherd," David says. Not everybody on the planet can say that. Not everybody in this room can say that. So to whom is God a shepherd? Well, first and obviously, the nation Israel. On several occasions the Old Testament refers to God as the Shepherd of His chosen people, Israel. A number of passages, let me just show you a couple, turn over to chapter 28, verse 9. "Save Your people and bless Your inheritance; be their shepherd also, and carry them forever." Look at Psalm 80, and all of these passages make the same point, but I'll just look at a couple of them with you. Psalm 80:1, "Psalm of Asaph. Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel," calling out to God, "You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth!" One hundred, those familiar words in Psalm 100:3, "Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us," it is He who has constituted us as a people, "and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

So, Israel was the sheep and God was their Shepherd. But notice that in Psalm 23 David doesn't say that God is merely the Shepherd of the nation to which he belongs, he says, "The Lord is my shepherd." So here's the key question. How does a person, how does an individual, become one of God's sheep and He is our Shepherd? Well, Jacob was the first to use this image of God in a personal way. In Psalm 48:15 Jacob blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day." Other Old Testament believers use the same image of themselves. For example, whoever wrote Psalm 119 says this in Psalm 119:176, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments."

And now, here in Psalm 23 David uses this same image of his own relationship to God. So here's the question, how does an individual become, like David, God's sheep? The answer is the

same in both Testaments. It is solely by God's grace. Turn to Isaiah, Isaiah 53. I want to remind you of a key text, Isaiah 53:6. Here, Israel in the future is looking back on how they responded to the Messiah and says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray." We had a shepherd, but we've gone astray from that shepherd, "Each of us," individually, "has turned to his own way, but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." That is, the suffering servant, the Messiah. Isaiah intended this description to be primarily a description of those who were supposed to be God's sheep by virtue of being in the nation Israel, but they all intentionally left the path, they all rebelled against their shepherd, and, as it turns out, Isaiah 53:6 is an indictment of every person in the nation of Israel and of every human being. It is the biography, not just of the Jewish people, but of every single person.

So, what was God going to do? Well, because of our desperate, sinful condition the Old Testament predicted that the great Shepherd King would come into the world. Look at Isaiah 40, back just a few pages, Isaiah 40:10. As Isaiah begins the second half of his prophecy, as he begins to unfold the coming Messiah, he says, "Behold, the LORD GOD will come with might." Adonai Yahweh, there God is in all caps, that is God's personal name.

Behold Adonai Yahweh will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will carry the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

Yahweh will come in the person of the Messiah as a conquering but generous King who will gently shepherd His people. Turn over to Ezekiel 34. Ezekiel continues this same prediction. Ezekiel 34, here Ezekiel is talking about how badly the leaders of the nation have shepherded God's people, and so he says, I am going to raise up a true shepherd. Look at verse 11, "For thus says the Lord GOD," thus says Yahweh,

Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for my sheep and I will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

And He talks about bringing them out of the nations. Notice verse 15, this is still Yahweh speaking, "I will feed my flock, and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord Yahweh." Now, notice how this is refined down in verse 23, he says, "Then I will set over My people one shepherd, My servant David." Wait a minute, Ezekiel lives after David, what's he talking about here? Does he mean David is going to be king again? No, this is a prediction of the One who will come in the line of David, of the Messiah. He says, I will put Him as the Shepherd. "And I, the Lord," I Yahweh, "will be their God," verse 24, "and My servant David," that is the descendent of David, "will be a prince among them; I Yahweh have spoken."

Here you have both a divine, I Yahweh, will shepherd My people, and a human, He will be in the line of David, Shepherd King. So who is the Shepherd King? The answer comes in Micah. Turn to Micah, Micah 5:2. You're familiar with this text. Here we find out where the Messiah will be born. "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel." He is going to be a king. "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." This is a prophecy about where the Messiah will be born, but notice verse 4,

And He will arise and shepherd His flock
In the strength of Yahweh,
In the majesty of the name of Yahweh,
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.
This One will be our peace.

The Old Testament said, the people have wandered, they have strayed to their own way, so I'm going to send the Shepherd King into the world, and the New Testament tells us that that Shepherd King has come. Turn with me to John 10. I want you to see this, this will wrap all of it up together. John 10, if I had time I'd walk you through this entire text, but let's just skip to verse 11, "I am," Jesus says, "the good shepherd," I am the shepherd of My people, and "the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep." Verse 14,

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; [*that is, not Jewish,*] I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

Here is the perfect fulfillment of all the Old Testament said, the Messiah, the Shepherd King will come and here Jesus says, I am that Shepherd, I am that Shepherd King, I will rule over My people. We now belong to Him as our Shepherd King because He laid down His life. He paid for us at the price of His own life, and so the rest of the New Testament refers to Jesus this way. In Hebrews 13:20, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead, the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord." First Peter 2:25, "you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and the Guardian of your souls." First Peter 5:4, "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

In the person of His Son, God has made us His sheep and He has become, in Christ, our Shepherd. Just as a shepherd does with his physical flock, Christ chose us, He bought us, He knows each of us individually, He calls each of us by name, He has made us His own and He

delights in caring for us. In fact, Psalm 23 is His divine job description. When you read, “Yahweh is my shepherd,” read, “Jesus is my Shepherd King.” This is a description of all that Jesus Christ is to you. He works day and night for the good of His sheep.

I love the way one commentator puts it, he says, “I am the good shepherd. In the dry and merciless logic of a commentary, trying laboriously to find out minute points of resemblance in which Christ is like a shepherd, the glory and tenderness of this sentence are dried up. But try to feel by imagining what the lonely Syrian shepherd must feel towards the helpless things which are the companions of his daily life, for whose safety he stands in jeopardy every hour, and then we have reached some notion of the love which Jesus meant to represent, that eternal tenderness which bends over us and knows the name of each, and the trials of each, and thinks of each, and gave Himself for each with a sacrifice as special and a love as personal as if in the whole world’s wilderness there was none other sheep, but that one.” “The Lord is my shepherd.” “I am the good shepherd.”

If you’ve never repented of your sins and put your faith in Christ and in Him alone, I’m sorry to tell you that Psalm 23 is not for you. You cannot claim its promises because ultimately the shepherd described there is none other than Jesus Christ. But if you will come to Him tonight He will become, even this day, your Shepherd. But if Jesus Christ is already your Lord and Savior then He is already your Shepherd, and He is everything to you that a shepherd is to his sheep. He is your Shepherd King.

Now here’s a key question to really understand this Psalm. To whom does David say, the Lord is my shepherd? To whom does he say this? Well, if you look at Psalm 23, you’ll notice that verses 4 and 5 David is speaking to God, but in verses 1 to 3 and verse 6, David is talking to himself. Can I say to you, it is the essence of faith to stop listening to yourself, as Lloyd Jones used to say, and instead start talking to yourself with what God has revealed as true in His word. Like David, remind yourself about this reality, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Yahweh, in the person of His Son, is my shepherd.

Or, do you live instead, instead of rehearsing what God has said to be true, do you live in the shadow lands of doubt and discouragement and defeat? Listen, stop listening to the lies that your mind generates on its own and continues to generate, and start speaking to yourself and to your soul as David did with the truth of what God has said. If you’re in Christ, the Lord, YAHWEH, is my shepherd. Yahweh IS, right now, wherever I find myself, my shepherd. Yahweh is MY shepherd. Yahweh is my SHEPHERD. The rest of the Psalm unfolds all that that means

Let’s pray together. Father, thank You for this incredible passage of Scripture. Thank You that even as we study the first line we meet Jesus. We meet our Lord face to face, the good Shepherd of the sheep, the One who laid down His life, the One who met Moses in the burning bush and declared Himself to be I am, is the One who is my Shepherd, my Shepherd King. Father, thank

You, and I pray that in the weeks to come You would unfold for us the richness of all that Jesus is to us as our Shepherd King.

I pray, Father, for those here tonight who don't know You through Jesus, who have never repented of their sins and never bowed their knee to you, never acknowledged their guilt, never pleaded with You for Your forgiveness. Father, I pray that tonight before they go to bed, they would find themselves alone in a dark place with their knees on the ground before You crying out for Your mercy, and may they find You to be their Shepherd. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.