

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller  
Meadowbrooke Church  
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## **The LORD of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**

### **Psalm 23:1**

#### **Introduction**

The Psalms are the song book of the Bible, and as you are probably aware, songs and poems are written out of the deep well of the human heart. The difference between the Psalms and every other song or poem is that the Psalms are inspired by God Almighty and are the Word of God. Of all the Psalms, it is the Psalm before us that is most familiar. In my opinion, what the Lord's prayer is to the New Testament, Psalm 23 is to the Old Testament. It is that familiar, and it is familiar for good reason.

Think for a moment what it is that Psalm 23 says of all those whose God is the LORD: He does not leave His sheep to themselves, but leads them to the place of life, nourishment, and rest with the assurance that He will not lose any that belong to Him. As the Shepherd, He promises to be with His sheep in the face of death and will stand before them in the face of the enemy. As the Shepherd of His sheep, those who belong to Him will only know His faithfulness and love which is a promise that not even death can take what belongs to the LORD, who is the Shepherd.

No wonder why this Psalm is often included in so many funerals or read at the bedside of the sick and dying. However, there is a danger with the amount of exposure we have had with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and that danger is as the saying goes: "Familiarity breeds contempt." By being so familiar with the Psalm, we can lose respect for what it says or miss the point of the Psalm altogether. My hope is that in the weeks to come, you will gain a better understanding of what this Psalm means for you and that over the weeks to come, you will experience the LORD of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

#### **Who is The LORD of Psalm 23?**

For you and me to appreciate the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, we have got to understand who the shepherd of the Psalm is. For starters, He is not just any old shepherd, He is the shepherd to all who truly know Him to be the LORD. One of the ways we can lose respect for this Psalm is to assume that it applies to any and all people. In the very first verse we are told that for the LORD to be the shepherd of any person, that person must belong to Him. The key word used in this verse is known as a "possessive determiner", and that word is "my." The way that you can know that He is your LORD is found in the second half of the first verse: "...**I will not be in need.**" You can know that you are not in need because you have the LORD as your shepherd, and the way that you know that He is your Lord is because you understand that there is no other "lord" in this world that gives you what only He can give you.

I have officiated many funeral and memorial services over the years, and my fear is that for some, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm was printed on their memorial card more for the beauty of the Psalm than

for how the deceased loved, followed, and identified with the God the Psalm describes. Before you can ever claim the kind of comfort and assurance the Psalm is meant to provide, you must answer who the LORD of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is first.

### **The Shepherd of Psalm 23 is Yahweh**

The LORD that David refers in Psalm 23 is Yahweh. The first time the Hebrew people were introduced to God as Yahweh is in Exodus 3 when Moses encountered God through the burning bush. Just so you know, there are many different names for God used to describe His character and nature; the name used that is God's covenantal name is Yahweh.

After 40 years of working for his father-in-law Jethro in the wilderness, God called out to Moses from a burning bush. Moses was in the wilderness because he had killed an Egyptian guard, buried his body in the sand, learned that it was known that he did it, and had fled Egypt and went into hiding. As Moses got closer to the burning bush, God told him to remove his sandals in His presence because the ground he was standing was now holy. God then told Moses that He heard the cries of His people and planned to use the now 80-year-old man to deliver the Hebrew people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. God was not going to send Moses into Egypt before Pharaoh alone, for God assured him: ***"I will be with you"*** (v. 12). Moses then asked what name he was to give to the Hebrews when he went back into Egypt; here is what he said: ***"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 is His name?' What shall I say to them"*** (v. 13)?

God's answer gets at the heart of what Yahweh means: ***"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you'"*** (v. 14). At the heart of God's answer are four facts about God for why the Israelites should believe God would deliver them: Yahweh is the Creator who is above all other gods man may make. Because Yahweh is the Creator, He sustains all things, governs all things, is sovereign over all things, and owns all things. As Yahweh, God is eternal, for He had no beginning and will have no end; He is the Alpha and the Omega, and as the Alpha and Omega, He is the first and the last. The essence of what Yahweh means is found in verse 14, ***"And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"***

God told Moses: "You tell the Hebrew slaves that I AM WHO I AM sent me to you." To wrap our minds around what God told Moses, I need to ask you in terms of your occupation or what you are currently doing day to day each week, "Who are you?" I am not asking if you are a Christian or not, I am asking what is it that requires your time? If I were to ask you to write down who you are, you may write: "I am an electrician." Or "I am a teacher." You might write down, "I am a programmer." You might write down, "I am a stay-at-home mother." "I am a dad, a mom, a grandmother, or grandfather." Here is the thing with all of that, the answer you give today to that question will one day change. One day you will not be able to work, one day you will retire, one day your children will move out of your home to begin a family of their own, and one day you will die. However, with God, He is "I AM WHO I AM."

One pastor said that what God said to Moses through the burning bush is the equivalent of saying: "I BE WHO I BE." The point is that we change, but the LORD does not change, nor will He ever change. Why? Because Yahweh is infinitely and perfectly self-sufficient and self-

existent; if you belong to Him, He is your shepherd and there is no other god or lord that you need! David Gibson, in his book, *The LORD of Psalm 23*, put it this way: "...the one whom you need to shepherd you neither needs you nor needs to be shepherded himself as he gives himself to shepherd you. He shepherds you from his eternally undiminishing fullness, and he is never the poorer for it."<sup>1</sup>

The Lord of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is unchanging, and it does not matter what you think of Him or what you make of Him, He is eternally who He has always been, what He still is today, and what He will always be: He is the Great I AM WHO I AM; He is Yahweh! However, what He may or may not be to you is your Shepherd. There is only one way to come to know Yahweh as your shepherd.

### **Jesus is the Shepherd of Psalm 23**

What dominates this Psalm is the promise of a life much fuller and richer than anything that any other god or lord can offer. The life that the LORD of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm provides is the abundant life! The kind of life that the Shepherd of Psalm 23 provides is one that includes food to satisfy the hungry, water to quench the thirsty, security for the vulnerable, and rest for the burdened sheep who come to the Shepherd out of a desperate awareness that all that the Shepherd is and has, is all that the sheep need.

There are a number of statements Jesus said about Himself that include the phrase: "I Am..." Just about every time He used that phrase, it unhinged the religious leaders of His day because they understood where that phrase was coming from, for it came from Exodus 3 when God said to Moses that He, Yahweh, was "I AM Who I AM." One of those statements is found in the gospel of John and the way that He said it, there can be no confusion what it was that He was claiming: **"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me..."** (John 10:14). Jesus said the only way to know the shepherd of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is by knowing who He is, believing in all that He claimed to be, and acting on what you know and believe concerning Him. Consider some of the things Jesus said about Himself:

**"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"**  
(John 7:37–38)

**"Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light."**  
(Matt. 11:28–30)

The reason Jesus was able to say these kinds of things was because He was, and is, and will forever be the good shepherd of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm! This is why He said, **"Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All those who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly"** (John 10:7–10). Again David

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<sup>1</sup> David Gibson, *The Lord of Psalm 23: Jesus Our Shepherd, Companion, and Host* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2024), p. 16.

Gibson offers the following insight of what it means to have the Shepherd of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: “Psalm 23 is about abundant life. It is more about the happiness of living than the sadness of dying, and all of the happiness is bound up with being able to say that this Lord who is a shepherd is also *my* shepherd.”<sup>2</sup>

So I ask you dear friend, who is the Shepherd to you? Is He *your* Shepherd because He is *your* LORD? Is He *your* Lord because you have found Him to be the Bread of Life who alone satisfies your hunger for more? Is He *your* Shepherd because in Jesus you have found Him to be the Living Water who alone is able to quench your thirsty soul? Can you honestly say, “**The LORD is my shepherd, I will not be in need**” (Ps. 23:1). It will not do to only have Psalm 23 posted on your memorial card after you die unless you have found Jesus to be your life today.

So, have you responded to His call? You do know that Jesus was talking about you when He said, “**I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice; and they will become one flock, with one shepherd**” (John 10:16). Have you heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, and do you listen to His voice? Or can it be said of you by the LORD of Psalm 23, “**Now why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say**” (Luke 6:46)?

There is a 460-year-old Catechism that has been passed down from generation to generation for the purpose of reminding and encouraging Christians of all ages that just as the God Moses encountered is unchanging, so is the great Shepherd of our souls, Jesus Christ, who “**is the same yesterday and today, and forever**” (Heb. 13:8). The catechism I speak of is the Heidelberg Catechism, and it begins with this question: “What is your only comfort in life and death?” Its answer is as follows:

That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto Him.

If you do know the LORD of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and I suspect that you do, then Psalm 23 is for you in both life and death!

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd,  
I will not be in need.
- <sup>2</sup> He lets me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.
- <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For the sake of His name.
- <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for You are with me;

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You have anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Certainly goodness and faithfulness will follow me  
All the days of my life,  
And my dwelling *will be* in the house of the LORD forever.

Amen.