

Sermon Davidsons Mains Parish Church Sun 28th Sept 2025

The Life of David series

Psalms 23 & John 10:11, 14-18, The Lord is My Shepherd.

Series wrap up

We're at the end of our series on the life of David. We've had the ups and the downs, the good, the bad and the very ugly. Dan's sermon last week on David's last words, and the last words of Jesus, really beautifully show us the differences between David as king, and Jesus as King.

Jesus' get em – with grace, and truth and love, go get those who are like you and not like you, go get them and bless them and love them...

Compared with David's, and other leaders 'go get em' <fist bump>, get 'em if they're not one of us, get 'em and show them we're boss... aggressive style threat.

There's only one of these that I want!

Continuity of the Old and New Testament

And this final sermon, I hope, draws again that line from David to Jesus. Showing us that both the Old and New Testament, point to, and reveal Christ as the ultimate King.

Today's reading is psalm 23. Better known as the Lord is my shepherd. It's David's most famous words. So well known. We sing them. We say them. I've found that people with faith just the size of a mustard seed, cling on to them too.

In 1866 the famous preacher Charles SPURGEON said 'I cannot say anything new upon this text. I have not even the desire to do so.'

And I'm with Spurgeon. This is a classic text, today I wish to encourage you simply to hear it again. I pray it encourages you and strengthens you. That you have a sense of the holy spirit being with you and refreshing you.

And if I share anything new about it with you, well that's a bonus.

Let's read Psalm 23....

Beautiful. I feel my body relaxing as I read the words. Do you?

Shepherds and sheep

Let's talk about sheep and shepherds, because we don't personally know many shepherds these days. We don't see them around Edinburgh do we?

We know that David was a shepherd before he was King. That God chose him when he was just a young ordinary shepherd boy. David knew his sheep and his shepherding, so this is a very familiar language for him. He understood the needs of sheep.

David is easily pictured as a shepherd; yet in this psalm he pictures himself as a *sheep* who receives care from the shepherd. The lord is my shepherd he says. The authority and responsibility lies elsewhere. He is the sheep.

I did my research, as always, and looked up some of the characteristics of sheep - I've got to be honest, they're cute and fluffy and give us useful things. But the characteristics are not all so complimentary! Yet, in Scripture, we, the people of God, are the sheep.

Good news – sheep can learn their own name, good hearing and sense of smell.

Bad news - Their intelligence is below that of pigs, on par with cattle. Timid. They are almost totally lacking in any protection from predators, they do not defend their territory. Poor depth perception, scared at shadows and dips in the ground.

They flock, they congregate close to each other, are naturally inclined to follow a leader. Stressed when separated from flock.

<personal> there have been several times when we've been driving in countryside and stopped to rescue sheep that have escaped from their field and are wandering on the roads, in danger from the cars, they seem to have no idea how to get back in their field. We often stop and pick them up and put the back where they ought to be.

We all need a good shepherd

A core message at the beginning of this psalm is that all sheep need a shepherd. Their welfare depends on it.

If no one looks after them, picks them up from the road, takes them to good pastures, protects them from dangers. They're in trouble.

I wonder how you feel about these sheep analogy.

What kind of shepherd are you looking for? Hoping for?

Or do you even *want* a shepherd - perhaps you want to go it alone and see what happens. I think most of us have been that sheep on the road at one point or another. Realising that we've taken a wrong turn and need help getting back to the right path.

So much about sheep depends on the kind of shepherd they have. They're vulnerable without. We are vulnerable without a shepherd. Sometimes we don't want to admit that.

John passage

So here's the good news. Let's look at John 10:11, then verses 14-18.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Jesus claims the title. **I am** the good shepherd he says. This psalm is about Him.

Jesus *is* the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep by name, cares for them, lays down his life for them. For us.

We can know the contentment and security that David describes here. This is our psalm too.

The first line says....

The lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing

The lord is MY shepherd. If you want to claim David's words for your own, you *can*. If you want to claim Jesus as your personal shepherd, you can claim these words. *You* can say the Lord is MY shepherd.

And you can know that Jesus has a *personal* interest in your life.

He is not distant. He cares deeply. There is a daily vigilance in being your shepherd.

In the song we sing 'I shall not want'. We may *want* many things in life. We want things for ourselves. For other people. For our world.

The passage actually says 'I *lack* nothing'. There's a difference between wanting and lacking. I *want* lots of things... but I can personally say, like David that I lack nothing...there's a peace that comes with that.

It takes some consideration, some thought, to say that I think. I lack nothing.

There are people who lack, practically and spiritually.

The one thing many people lack is meaningful connection, particularly with their creator, their shepherd. That *is* lack, lack of connection, direction, protection, salvation.

'I lack nothing' might *not* describe our life with God as it is, but it could be as we sing it, a future event, goal, our life with God as it could be. Where God wants to take us to, to that place where we find in God everything we could ever want.

We could ask God to help us to want nothing besides him.

He makes me lie in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he refreshes my soul

The psalm begins to describe what life with God looks like on a daily basis.

And it starts with God encouraging us to lie down and rest, beside still, refreshing waters. And restoring our souls.

Beautiful peaceful imagery.

Here we see Jesus providing security for his sheep. The shepherd has to lead them to pastures. They don't know how to get there themselves.

He refreshes our souls – we can take that to mean our whole being – our whole self – we need it don't we? Fully refreshed.

Do they need to be refreshed just the once? No, again and again. Life can be tough, our world gnaws at our souls, throws us out of step with where we want to be.

Some souls seem constantly restless.

Our souls need constant refreshment. Jesus tells us (Matthew 11) 'come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'.

Jesus is saying - I am the good shepherd. I can grant you that restoration.

Jesus can refresh and restore your souls.

There are things in life that refresh, things that help us feel calm- friends, time out of the busy-ness, counselling, art, books, swimming, walking in the hills, food. Do make sure that you do what it is that refreshes your soul.

This sounds like a deep restoration – profound. I have seen people restored from the deepest and darkest of experiences. Turned around, from addiction, painful life experiences, dark places.

Jesus *restores* souls in a truly powerful way.

He can wash away all the things that we regret, that trouble us, that lay like a thick covering on our minds and hearts, he can wash them away and make us clean again. Restoring our soul.

He wants to lead us besides the still waters and grant us rest.

Lots of people choose this Psalm as a reading at their funeral, which makes sense and it's a beautiful choice. It looks to that day of restoration.

But what a shame if we don't try to touch it in this life too. If we just accept the chaos and the pain and the grime of life and what we have done.

Jesus wants to refresh and restore our souls in this life too. Not just in the future, for his future Kingdom. but for today, for his Kingdom come here, now, as it is in heaven...

His Kingdom is supposed to impact the earth. our faith is supposed to impact the earth. If your faith only looks to the future and doesn't impact today, you're missing out. Jesus has already laid down his life for you. He's done it.

His goodness restores our souls....

'He guides me along the right paths for his names sake'

It's not rest without purpose. It's rest, in order to refresh and then to lead us on.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. He stakes His holy name on this venture. Jesus guides us on the right path for the sake of his own glory.

'What is this right path?' you may ask? 'How do we recognise it or know we're going the right way?'

Good question. Sometimes it's easier to see it looking backwards than forwards.

A prayer by Thomas Merton begins like this: *"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going."* But he trusts that simply desiring to please God is itself pleasing to God. So, he prays, *"I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing."* *"And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road."*

It's having a heart for God. Raising our sails to His holy leading. Merton had come to believe that his shepherd would lead him along right pathways, even when he felt a little lost. That is the promise of our shepherd.

Sometimes we try to lead God. I think, 'hey, let's go this way' - well I know that I can try! But that's not the order of grace is it?

We take our position behind the shepherd.

Through Dark valleys

‘even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff, they comfort me’.

The valley here is a scary place. He’s probably picturing a dry stream bed, carved between high rocks. These would be scary places. There could be outlaws, or wild animals or danger of flooding.

A good Shepherd had to be fearless. 1Samuel 17 records that David protected his sheep from bears and lions.

I went on a safari once. At the end of the day we were escorted to our tent by a man with a large stick. We were warned not to leave the tent until he came back the following morning to escort us once again. ‘*Whatever* you hear’ he said, ‘don’t leave without me.’

We knew that there were crocodiles in the river next to us. And elephants and lions in the jungle just beyond. We took this to be excellent advice! We didn’t go anywhere without our escort. It would have been very dangerous to do so.

The passage says that even when we’re on the right path. And assured that we will not get lost. We may still find ourselves in dark valleys. Even in ‘the darkest valley’, we can fear no evil, for our protector is with us.

And there is a double meaning here, a physical and a spiritual, I wonder what our own darkest valleys are, our own lions.... Some folk are in a dark valley just now. I pray God behind, God beside, and God ahead for you.

David says - ‘you are with me.’ Jesus is with *you*. In the Hebrew there are 26 words before this phrase, and 26 words after it. It is in the exact middle of the psalm. The very heart of the psalm. *You are with me*. This position is not an accident, it is intended to place this right in the heart of the poem. This is its key message. You are with me.

If you remember nothing else this morning, take *this* away. Jesus is with you.

In the lush pastures and the dark valleys. He is with you. Stick with your guide.

Jesus was called Emmanuel which means.... God with us.

That is why we may not fear. Even in dark valleys. Even in the shadow of death. Even when evil is around us. God is with us. Our shepherd is leading, guiding, and laying down his life for ours.

Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, knows and understands our deepest struggles and emotions. He is with us in our human frailty and weakness. *That’s* why David can say ‘I lack nothing. I have all that I need.’

The upper room

5th verse – ‘you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows’.

Here David imagines the enemies outside the camp, able to see us within. We are enjoying our meal. Honoured guests had their heads anointed with oil, we are honoured guests. We are protected. The things that would harm us are unable to, thanks to the shepherd.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus prepared a table. In that upper room. In the presence of his enemies.

He prepared a table. He anointed their feet. He raised the cup and offered it to them.

He reenacted this psalm the night before he died.

The Good shepherd prepares a place for us. The Meal is ready. The cup of grace is overflowing. Goodness and mercy in abundance.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the lord forever

God's goodness and mercy doesn't sit still, it doesn't wait for us in eternity. It follows us about all the days of our life!

How wonderful is that. God's goodness and mercy following, going with us, being in us, as we go to Tesco's. To work. To see friends and family. In the celebrations and the hard activities of life. His goodness and mercy being there. Following us.

Jesus pursues us! Never letting us go.

Have you ever felt pursued by God? like you've run away, you've quit church you've had enough of religion, people, you're done with it... But somehow God is pursuing you? Following you. You catch yourself in moments or encounters which you *know* are of Him?

<God's pursuit of me into ministry was ridiculous. I tried and tried to get away from it. but in the end, when I was in Princes Street gardens, and a video came on the huge screen on the Ross Bandstand, asking *me* if I thought I'd been called into ministry. At that point I knew it didn't matter where I went, I couldn't hide>

He pursues us.

Let yourself be caught!

...because how long do we get to dwell in the house of the Lord for? Did you notice? Forever. This is an eternal promise. This is a beyond this life promise. This is why this is such a popular funeral reading and song – because our shepherd has prepared a way for us to be with him **forever**.

He laid down his life, to wash us clean, to make a way for us. We can follow his path and know with assurance that he will provide an eternity free from sorrow. Free from our enemies.

We will sit and eat at the banquet with Him forever.

Psalm for you.

This is David's shepherd, despite everything. My shepherd, despite everything. Your shepherd.

He is with us. Always. Tuck that into your heart. Tuck it in.

Whenever you feel distant. Afraid. Restless. Close your eyes and invite him to take you to those still waters. And restore your soul.

Know that he is with you now, and always.

Amen.

Let's pray.

Jesus you said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:27).

Lord thank you for this promise.

For those whose hearts are troubled, bring your peace. For those walking in the darkest valleys, do not leave their sides. For our troubled world, bring your peace we pray.

Amen.