

In this course, we are doing a detailed study of selected Psalms. In the last session, we studied Psalm number 8 in detail. Today, we will study Psalm number 23 in detail. Psalm 23 is not only the most famous Psalm in the Book of Psalms, but it is also the most famous chapter out of all 1189 chapters in the entire Holy Bible.

The most famous verse in the Holy Bible is in the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Similarly, the most famous chapter in the Holy Bible is Psalm 23, which we also call the 23rd Psalm. Sometimes, when a teaching or a writing is often before us, and we often meet, hear, or see it, the result is that we do not understand the deep meaning and true message of that writing.

This happens because we think, "I already know this," "I have known it since childhood." I have noticed that Psalm 23 is also such a Psalm which we have memorized by heart, written down, or even hung on the wall as a piece of art. We read it in times of sickness, death, or trouble.

The result is that many times we do not understand the deep spiritual truth of this Psalm because for many people it is just a way to get health, healing, or relief in sickness, trouble, or death—and nothing more.

Some people use it just like a prescription: when they are troubled or sick, they think, "Use this good prescription." They do not understand the message of this Psalm deeply or make it part of their soul, heart, and mind.

So now, open with me Psalm 23 from the Old Testament. Everyone read it with me. Whether you are online or here in the class, we will read it together. When I say "three," we will read it together: One, Two, Three.

Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will 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 anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen!

The Lord is my shepherd.

Introduction:

This Psalm belongs to the type called “Psalm of trust,” “Psalm of confidence,” “Psalm of hope,” “Psalm of reliance,” or “Psalm of faith,” where a person trusts God. It is a spiritual song of trust and confidence in God.

Traditionally, people use this Psalm when someone is sick or near death, but using it only this way limits its meaning. Psalm 23 can be read during sickness, or when someone is on their deathbed because verse 4 says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”

But the real message is a message of comfort for all times and all difficulties in life — not only in sickness or death. Our whole life’s shepherd is God.

If we look at the structure of this Psalm, it can be divided into two parts:

- Verses 1 to 4 is the first part where the Lord is shown as the shepherd: “The Lord is my shepherd.”
- Verses 5 and 6 is the second part where the Lord is shown as the host (one who provides a feast or hospitality).

So the first four verses say, “The Lord is my shepherd,” and the last two say, “The Lord is my host.”

As I said, we don’t usually read this Psalm deeply, so maybe you have never heard that Psalm 23 shows God not only as a shepherd but also as a host. Not only “God is my shepherd” but also “God is my host.”

Now, let’s think carefully about these two parts from a detailed point of view.

The Lord is my shepherd:

Here, the Psalm writer uses the picture of a shepherd who cares for the sheep. In the Old Testament, God of Israel is shown as a shepherd many times. You should note these references and read them later because time is limited now, and we cannot read all of them here.

- Genesis 48:15 (God as shepherd)
- Genesis 49:24
- Psalm 28:9 “Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.”
- Psalm 80:1 “Shepherd of Israel, listen...”
- Isaiah 40:11
- Ezekiel 34:15
- Micah 7:14

In these places, God is shown as the shepherd of Israel in the Old Testament. But remember, the picture of God as a shepherd is not only about being a shepherd or caretaker of our lives.

In the Ancient Near East, the image of a shepherd was also used for kings. A king was called the shepherd of his people or his nation. In Jewish tradition, the king of Israel was called the shepherd of the people.

So, when the Psalm writer says, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,” he means that God (Yahweh), who is my shepherd, is also my king and ruler. He is my shepherd king, my ruler shepherd, who provides for me and protects me just like a king does for his people.

Hillel the Levite says, “I shall not want” means God provides for me.

Then, in verses 2 and 3, four things are said about Yahweh our shepherd king:

1. He makes me lie down in green pastures — like a shepherd who takes sheep to grass to eat.
2. He leads me beside quiet waters — like a shepherd who takes sheep to water to drink.
3. He restores my soul — He refreshes my soul.
4. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake — He guides me on the right path.

I remember a story of a young man who just got married. He saw green pastures and on the first day, his mother-in-law fed him “methi” (fenugreek), second day “saag” (greens), third day spinach. On the fourth day, she asked what he wanted to eat and he said, “Mother, don’t worry, I will go out myself.”

Just like a shepherd feeds sheep to give them strength, the Psalm writer says God, our shepherd king, provides for us and gives us strength.

He also leads us to still waters to refresh us. The phrase “He restores my soul” means He refreshes my inner being. When sheep need guidance, the shepherd leads them. God does the same for us.

So, here, God is our guide and provider.

Then it says, “He leads me in paths of righteousness.” Righteousness means right living or justice. Like a father who leads his child on the right path, God leads us on the right path.

It is also mentioned in the book of Proverbs that the boy does not turn away from this path even when he grows old. Just like that, God leads us on the paths of truth and righteousness for the sake of His name, for the sake of the glory of His name, for the honor of His name, and for the greatness of His name. God takes us on the right path. There is also a challenge for us in this: when we follow the Lord and serve Him, the goal should be the glory of God’s name. We should do things for God’s name, not for our own name.

Then David, while writing this Psalm, imagines himself in a dark and scary valley. He has come down from the mountains into this valley, and there is darkness in it. In this darkness, there are scary animals, wild beasts, and troubles. David has no way except to go through this valley. Even then, he says, “Even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear any evil.” Whether it is wild animals, evil powers, or deadly enemies, he will not be afraid because God is with him.

Here, the phrase “valley of the shadow of death” in Hebrew can also mean “deep darkness.” He says, even if there are floods or deep darkness, even if I have to go through this and I don’t know who will

attack me, still I will not be afraid because You are with me. So, “valley of the shadow of death” in Hebrew shows deep darkness or deep shadows.

As I said earlier, many people, when they are near death, read this Psalm and especially this verse. This is not a bad thing, it is good. But we should not wait until then to read it. In our lives, many times we face dark and difficult times. Even then, we should read this Psalm.

Next, it says, “Your rod and Your staff comfort me.” Here, the rod and staff are signs of God’s power and authority. The shepherd had both. The rod was a big stick, and the staff was a smaller stick. So, this means God’s power and authority — You have power, O God, You have authority, and because of that, I am comforted. When the sheep got lost or a wild animal attacked, the shepherd used his rod and staff to protect the sheep. Just like that, our God protects us with His authority and power, comforts us, guides us, and provides for us.

If today there is sickness, trouble, poverty, financial difficulty, or other problems around you, then trust God’s rod and staff. Trust His authority and power. Thank Him and say, “God, whatever my situation is, Your rod and staff, Your power and authority comfort me.”

Hallelujah! Sometimes the situation does not change, but God’s authority and power give us the strength to face those situations, and then the situations change. God changes us instead of changing the situation.

One person said (maybe a president of America or someone important), “I don’t pray that my children’s lives will be easy. I pray that God makes them strong so they can face the hard things in life.” So, God’s power and authority give us the grace to face the hard and difficult things in life.

Verses 5 to 6 show God as a host — God as a host and God as a shepherd. These two are not different. The shepherd king, the shepherd ruler, the shepherd king calls me now to his house, in front of my enemies. He calls me and makes me sit, then serves food to me. He honors me. By honoring me, what is He doing to my enemies? He is embarrassing them.

So, our God who is king, the Psalm writer says, is the host for those who believe in Him. Imagine if Donald Trump, or our Chief Minister Maryam, or Shehbaz Sharif invited you to their house and served food to you. How would you feel? Would you feel honored? You would feel special and precious. “I am special and precious, I am honored.” Our God, Yahweh, the king of kings, the God of gods, the ruler over all kings, the living eternal one, the great king, the true word, the creator, owner, and provider — my brother, my sister — He is your and my host. So, you are not cheap or ordinary people. You are special, precious, and chosen by God.

In ancient times, the host would do these things for the guest: prepare food, pour oil on the guest’s head (this was a way of welcoming), anointing with fresh oil, and then offer a bowl of cold water. This showed respect and honor to the guest.

Notice here, God is doing all these three things for His servant. It says, “He prepares a table before me,” which means He sets food before me. “You anoint my head with oil,” means You welcome me into Your home by pouring oil on me. “My cup overflows,” means You give me fresh, refreshing water after a long and hot journey.

And God the host does all this not in secret but in front of His enemies. This shows that if my cup is full of God's love, mercy, presence, and provision, then the opposite is true for my enemies — God's cup of wrath is poured on them.

If today anyone is hurting or harming the church of Jesus Christ, or His people, either as a group or as individuals, then my brothers and sisters, we must believe that the God of heaven who fills the cup of His people with His presence and provision is also the just God. He will pour the cup of His wrath — His justice — on the cruel, evil, and those who harm others.

Sometimes we don't see this. It looks like the evil enemies are getting stronger, but God has His own time to bring justice and wrath. We must pray for those who hurt us, bless those who curse us, and trust that God Himself will take revenge and punish them for their evil and wrong actions.

Hallelujah! Verse 6 says, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me." In Hebrew, the word for goodness is "tov," and mercy is "chesed." Chesed means God's eternal love, His faithful kindness, His goodness, and His loving loyalty. These will be with me all the time. Just like a shepherd protects his sheep with goodness and mercy. These two feelings — goodness and mercy — were always in the heart of the shepherd for his sheep.

David tells us that just like this, God who is with us, is with us by His goodness and mercy. God being with us means His kindness, His goodness, His grace, and His love stay with me all my life, even when I do not feel it, even when I do not feel it.

Remember brothers and sisters, God's goodness and love with us does not depend on whether we feel it or not, not all the time, 24 hours every day. Sometimes, there are situations and events when it is not possible for us to feel it. We become very worried, tired, or sad, but God's promise does not depend on my feelings. Even when we do not feel it, God is with us.

There is a very touching story about a sister whose house was near the sea shore. Every morning she used to go to the sea shore, walk there, walk barefoot on the cool sand, and pray. Alongside her own footprints, she used to see another set of footprints. She believed that it was the Lord walking beside her.

Difficulties and troubles came in her life, and her own people left her, abandoned her. She became very sad and worried. When she went for a walk, she did not see the other footprints in the sand. She became very disappointed, came back home, fell on the ground and said:

"O Lord! I thought when everyone else would leave me, You would stay with me. But today, You did not walk with me."

When she finished speaking, the Lord said:

"O my foolish daughter! I did not leave you. The footprints in the sand that you thought were yours this morning, they were mine. I was carrying you in my arms, so you could not walk."

So God, the Lord, is with us in every way, even when we do not feel it.

Then it is written:

“I will live in the house of the Lord forever.”

This means I will live my whole life, David says, in the presence of the Lord.

Now, how does this Psalm apply to us as believers of the New Testament? As Christians, from a biblical theology point of view, this Psalm fits very beautifully with our lives and service.

It is written: The Lord is my shepherd. When you come to the New Testament, this God who was the shepherd in the Old Testament, who was the shepherd king, we talked about that — that while being a shepherd, He was a shepherd king, He was a shepherd ruler.

This God came to this world in the form of Jesus Christ, and in John’s Gospel, chapter 10, verse 11, He says:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

So the Shepherd King, the shepherd king Jesus Christ, came into this world and gave His life on the cross for our salvation, forgiveness of sins, restoration, and reconciliation with God and each other.

But to prove that He is that shepherd, that king, and that ruler who finished the work of salvation, He did not stay in the grave but rose from the dead on the third day.

Hallelujah! Clap loudly for the Lord Jesus, who is our shepherd and king.

Then as the Psalm writer says:

“You are with me.”

Then He says:

“Goodness and mercy will follow me all my life.”

When the Lord Jesus Christ was about to be born in this world, it is said in Matthew 1:23:

“Look, a virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call his name Immanuel, which means God with us.”

Through Jesus Christ, God became with us. The God who was with David in the valleys of death, whose goodness and mercy was with David, He is with us today through Jesus Christ.

So when He was born, His name was given as Immanuel — God with us.

And then when He rose from the dead and after showing Himself to His disciples for forty days, when He was about to go to heaven, in Matthew 28:20, He made a promise to His disciples and to us at the end of that chapter, verse 20:

“Look, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

Hallelujah! David also said that he will live forever in the Lord's house, and now the Lord Jesus, our King and shepherd, says, "I am with you."

Then in the Psalm, we read that the Lord is a host who sets a table in front of His people. Our Jesus is such a great host who gave us not just any food but His own body to eat and His own blood to drink, to make us peaceful, to restore us, to make us alive spiritually.

What greater hosting can there be!

In Matthew 26:26-29 it is written:

When they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying:

"Take, eat, this is my body."

Then He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying:

"Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

So Jesus Christ gave His body to eat and His blood to drink and by hosting, He opened the door for us to enter His house, and by giving His life on the cross, He took on Himself the cup of God's anger, that cup of God's justice that was to be poured on us.

The cup of God's justice was poured on Jesus Christ on the cross, and the cup of God's love and mercy was poured out for you and me, so that we may be saved from the justice of sin, Satan, and death, and may know God's mercy and love.

So in the New Covenant, our Lord Jesus is our shepherd, our king, and our host, and He is with us.

By whose power? David says in Psalm 23:

"You anointed my head with oil."

In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and guests were anointed with oil.

In the New Testament, the place of oil has been taken by the Holy Spirit in the covenant of Jesus Christ. God has anointed us with the oil of the Holy Spirit. God has chosen us with His oil, His Spirit's oil.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ is with you and me through the Holy Spirit.

So no matter what situations, events, or difficulties come, always confess that the Lord is my shepherd. I will not lack anything. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear any evil, because You are with me. Your rod and Your staff comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all my life, and I will live forever in the house of the Lord.

Amen! May the Lord bless you all today through this study and application of Psalm 23.

