***Shepherd Lord***

***Psalm 23 & John 10:10-14***

***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Psalm 23:1***

***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John 10:11***

***“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,” John 10:14***

Good morning! We gather together this morning because we have GOOD NEWS to celebrate: Jesus is risen! He is risen, indeed! We are EASTER PEOPLE! Do you hear that? No matter where we are this morning, no matter that we are in a global pandemic, we still have GOOD NEWS!

The tomb is empty, and Jesus lives in and through each one of us because of the Holy Spirit. This morning we begin a 7-week journey to Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. Over six months ago, the Lord, our Good Shepherd. put it on my heart to preach a six-week sermon series on Psalm 23 after Easter. Who would have known that we would be on lockdown, shut out of our churches, workplaces and schools? Who knew that all but the essential people would be STAYING HOME? For sure, our times are confusing and frightening. At times like these, we need a Good Shepherd! As we begin our series on Psalm 23, I pray that our good shepherd will lead us beside still waters sand green pastures. I pray our good shepherd will help us walk through this dark valley of pandemic and prepare a table for us in the middle of our journeys.

If you have your Bible with you, turn to Psalm 23 and John 10. If you are watching live online, there is a link for a Bible, for prayer and live chat. Join us in our time of worship!

Let me set the stage before we jump into God’s Word.

The twenty-third Psalm is the most beloved Psalm in the Psalter and possibly the best- loved chapter in the entire Bible. The great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, called it “the pearl of Psalms.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Millions of people have memorized this Psalm. Ministers have used this Psalm to comfort those who are going through personal trials, suffering illnesses, facing death. Max Lucado has a way with words when he described Psalm 23 this way, “Do more beloved words exist? Framed and hung on hospital walls, quoted by the young and whispered by the dying. In these lines, sailors have found a harbor, the frightened have found a father and the strugglers have found a friend. And because the passage is so deeply loved and widely known can you find ears on which these words have never fallen? Set to music in a hundred songs, translated into a thousand tongues, domiciled (God makes his home) in a million hearts. One of those hearts might be yours.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Let us listen for God’s word to us today from Psalm 23 and the Gospel of John.

Let us pray: “Lord, You are the Good Shepherd. We are the sheep. Today as we study your Word, we don’t know what to do or what to think about all that is going around us today. Like a good shepherd, guide and direct our steps and our stops during this time of lockdown. God, today we ask that your Word is alive and redemptive for each and every one of us right here, right now. Give us hope. Feed our hungry hearts. We ARE Easter people, we worship a risen Christ. Amen.

Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2. He makes me lie down in green pastures;*

*he leads me beside still waters; 3. he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. 4. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, {Or [the valley of the shadow of death]} I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

John 10:10-14

*10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11.* *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me…*

For the past several months, I have been collecting different thoughts and writings on Psalm 23. The more I have read, the more I feel overwhelmed. There have been volumes written, thousands of sermons given, and a surplus of thoughts and illustrations on just this one Psalm.

For these 7 weeks, we will journey to Pentecost: the birth of the church. This should be a fulfilling time as we prepare our hearts, our homes, our minds, to celebrate the joy of the coming of the Holy Spirit and birth of the church. Let’s begin!

What I find interesting about Psalm 23 is the placement it has in the book of Psalms: right after Psalm 22--called the “Psalm of the Cross.” Psalm 22 is the Psalm that Jesus quoted from the cross, ***“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”*** There are no green pastures, no still waters, no table prepared for us in the presence of our enemies in Psalm 22. After we hear ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** We hear these words, ***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”***

This Psalm and the image that it paints express the very essence of faith. King David is credited with writing these powerful words. Do you know that David was a King but he began as a shepherd boy? David was a shepherd King, he knew what it meant to gather his sheep, to sleep with his sheep, to protect his sheep. David knew the needs of his sheep, their nature and he knew that sheep were wholly dependent on their shepherd.

I would like for us to focus on three words --- **UNCHANGING --- TRUST --- CONTENTMENT.** These 3 words lead us to three distinct thoughts from verse one. First, God is unchanging --- He is Lord. Second, God is trustworthy, trust is a requirement of our relationship with the Shepherd. Third, God is our unchanging provider and contentment is the result of trusting our unchanging Shepherd.

**GOD IS UNCHANGING**

King David, the shepherd boy, gives us 115 words to explain the first two words of his psalm, ***“The Lord.”*** In the opening of his book, *“A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23”, Phillip Keller* presents us with probing questions, “The Lord! But who is the Lord? What is His character? Does He have adequate credentials to be my Shepherd --- my manager --- my owner?”[[3]](#endnote-3)

The word ***“Lord”*** is the English translation of the great Old Testament personal name for God. This name for God was first revealed to another shepherd of long ago--Moses. To read about Moses, we must go back to Exodus 1! Moses—the baby born and set in a basket floating on the Nile. Moses—found by pharoah’s daughter. Yes, THAT MOSES! By now Moses is an adult, he’s run away from the palace and is on the backside of the wilderness when he encounters a burning bush. In this encounter with God at the burning bush, God reveals His name to Moses as ***“Yahweh.”*** The word ***“Yahweh”*** is a **verb** and it literally means ***“I AM who I AM --- I will be who I will be.”*** The word ***“Yahweh”*** appears over 6,800 times in the Bible. ***“Yahweh”*** was so holy of a name that the Hebrew people used the names ***“Jehovah”*** and ***“Adonai”*** in place of ***“Yahweh.”***

This is the name ***“Yahweh”*** that David gives in Psalm 23. What the shepherd King is telling us is that the Shepherd Lord is inexhaustible, self-sufficient, all powerful and timeless. “I am who I am” needs no power, He is all powerful. “Yahweh --- I AM who I AM” is UNCHANGING! Unchanging means that God has, is, and will always the same. Yahweh was the same yesterday; Yahweh will be the same today and Yahweh will be unchanged and unchangeable forever and ever. Yahweh is our great “I AM.”

I have a poster in my office that always reminds me that no matter what I am going though, Yahweh is with me: *“I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking: ‘My name is I AM’ He paused. I waited. He continued, ‘When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WAS. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WILL BE. When you live in this moment it is not hard. I am here. My name is I AM.’”[[4]](#endnote-4)*

This is exactly the promise that David is giving us when he begins Psalm 23 by saying “The Lord is my Shepherd.” The Lord is our Shepherd NOW --- not just in the past or in the future. The Lord is with us now and He is Yahweh-- UNCHANGING!

Friends, this is Good News! This is grand news! This is glorious news as we find ourselves in middle of a stay-at-home order with only the essential people working. As we wonder what will happen to our future, we are to remember that no matter what changes are happening around us, one thing is certain: our God will never change. His love for us is unchanging--even in the middle of a pandemic. YAHWEH remains the same despite everything else around us. YAHWEH, I AM, our GOD is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We can rest secure in who God is. We can exclaim with David --- “The Lord is my shepherd” --- no matter what else is going on in the world. Say it with me, “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD!”

POINT 1: GOD IS UNCHANGING. GOD IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW.

**GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY**

**TRUST IS A REQUIREMENT OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SHEPHERD**

The other amazing idea in verse 1 is found in two words: ***“my Shepherd.”***  Sheep are the most dependent animals of all livestock. Sheep depend on the shepherd to lead them to clean water and to fields green with fresh grass. Sheep depend on the shepherd to heal their wounds, protect them from wild animals and to lead them safely on dangerous mountain slopes. Here’s a fun thought: you wake up this morning, YOU ARE THE SHEPHERD and you have a flock of sheep that you are leading up to Mount Baldy! Now, THAT’S A JOB! When I pastored in Round Rock, Texas, my associate pastor came from a farming family. She raised sheep. She always said, “Sheep are the dumbest!” Now, again, you’ve just woken up from a nice, peaceful sleep in some dirt field. Morning is here. I have no idea if there’s coffee but I do know that it’s your job to get those 100 or so sheep up or down the dirt mountain road! Good luck!

This reminds me of the story found in Luke 15. The Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep. Listen! The shepherd goes looking for the sheep when they are lost. Are you lost right now? Do you feel lost? The Good Shepherd comes to look for you! The shepherd takes care of the sheep because if anything would ever happen to the sheep it would be a personal reflection on the shepherd. In other words, the sheep and the shepherd have a relationship of trust.

When we say, ***“The Lord is my Shepherd”*** we express **our trust in God.** Our Lord is a personal Shepherd. The personal pronoun used is a first-person singular. To say, “The Lord is ***A*** Shepherd” suggests there are many shepherds and the Lord is one among many. To say “The Lord is ***THE*** Shepherd” suggests that the Shepherd is not a personal shepherd. To say, “The Lord is ***OUR*** Shepherd” implies a crowd of people being shepherded. David writes, “The Lord is ***MY*** Shepherd.” David suggests a personal relationship with a person YAHWEH.

When we read and recite the words, ***“The Lord is MY Shepherd”*** we are expressing our trust in our personal relationship with our unchanging Shepherd. We are saying, “The unchanging God of yesterday, today and tomorrow in my personal Shepherd. I trust my shepherd.”

Dwight L. Moody’s favorite verse was Isaiah 12:2: ***“I will trust, and not be afraid.”*** Listen to Moody, *“You can travel first-class or second-class to heaven. Second class is, ‘What time I am afraid, I will trust.’ First class is, ‘I will trust, and not be afraid.’ That is the better way. Why not buy a first-class ticket?* (Ps 56:3)[[5]](#endnote-5)

I don’t know about you, but I’m buying the first-class ticket! “The Lord is my shepherd. I will trust and not be afraid.” (Pause.)

I like the small boy’s interpretation of the hymn, “Trust and Obey.” The real words are, “Trust and obey, there is no better way to be happy in Jesus, trust and obey.” The young boy’s version from Sunday School was, “Trust and ok. There is no better way to be happy in Jesus. Trust and OK!” Isn’t that great? Everything must be O. K. if our life has been committed to our Shepherd’s precious keeping? TRUST AND OK…there is no other way to be happy in Jesus. TRUST AND OK.[[6]](#endnote-6)

As we begin to study Psalm 23, we are called to trust in God! Like sheep who trust their shepherd, having the Lord as my shepherd means I trust God to provide for me, protect me, and care for me.

POINT 2: Verse 1 of Psalm 23, **“The Lord is my Shepherd” is the foundation of our relationship of trust with God.**

**CONTENTMENT COMES FROM TRUSTING THE SHEPHERD**

Just knowing the Lord as my shepherd leads me into true contentment. There is a story told of a Sunday school teacher who asked her class if anyone could recite the entire twenty-third Psalm. One little girl waved her arm and told the teacher she had memorized the whole Psalm. The teacher invited the girl up in front of the class. The little girl stood, faced the class and said, “The Lord is my Shepherd, that’s all I want.” Oh, that we would come to know the good shepherd in this way! “The Lord is my shepherd—that’s all I want!” Are you content knowing “the Lord is MY shepherd”? Is that all you want?

One of my favorite authors is Brennan Manning. In his book *“Ruthless Trust,”* he shares a story about going to visit his spiritual director. Brennan’s Spiritual Director said to him, ***“Brennan, you do not need any more insights into the faith. You have enough insights to last you three hundred years. The most urgent need in your life is to trust that which you have received.”[[7]](#endnote-7)***

Jesus says in John 10:14, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.”*

I would like to share a story of how God taught me to trust Him more. As many of you know, I wear a cross most of the time.The cross was given to me in 1986 when I attended a Cursillo Weekend in Indiana. The back of the cross says, ***“Christ is counting on you.”*** I have worn this cross for 34 years. Each morning when I put on my cross, I remember the words ***“I am counting on Christ.”*** Every day for the past 34 years, over 13,000 days, this cross has been a reminder for me to count on Christ! One night I noticed I had lost my cross. I looked all over the house thinking I had dropped it. I could not find it. I remembered that my wife and I had gone for a walk. Jac kept telling me that we needed to go back and trace our steps. (Jac was counting on Christ, I must have been counting sheep!) I knew, or I thought I knew, that there was no way the cross could have come loose and fallen off —I would have felt it—it’s a heavy cross! I would have heard it clink on the cement sidewalk. At her insistence, we went for a walk and retraced our steps. While walking, I remembered the tree branch that I stepped on. It had rolled and I had stumbled. Jac was sure that was where I lost the cross. I looked. “Nope. Not there.” Jac walked over to the same spot, rustled around the branches and said, “Hey, lookyloo—your cross.”

I have to confess. Jac calls me a KIA: KNOW IT ALL. I’m a pretty confident person who often pretends I know it all—I don’t need anyone else to help me, I got it covered—haha. The truth is that I didn’t want to go on a RETRACE YOUR STEPS walk because I knew I had not lost my cross on that walk and I didn’t want to waste my time. Jac insisted. Even when we stopped at the spot where I had tripped on the tree branch the night before, I was still certain that I had not lost my cross there. Jac was doing TRUST AND OBEY. I was doing my own version of TRUST AND OK..I’M A KIA, I KNOW I’M RIGHT, WE ARE WASTING TIME HERE! Well, I was wrong. Sometimes the shepherd likes to teach me contentment through my wife who was perfectly willing to waste her time looking for my cross. TRUST AND OBEY, THERE’S NO BETTER WAY TO BE HAPPY (CONTENT) IN JESUS? TRUST AND OBEY!

From that simple experience, even after 34 years of wearing my cross, I’m still learning to trust my shepherd even more! I’m learning to be CONTENT as my shepherd leads me, guides me, and protects me.

***“The Lord is MY Shepherd; I shall not want.”***

1. My shepherd is YAHWEH…I AM WHO I AM..I AM UNCHANGING…I AM THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW….
2. MY shepherd is TRUSTWORTHY…and this trust is the FOUNDATION of my faith and the foundation of Psalm 23: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD…I SHALL NOT WANT.
3. From these two points—that my shepherd is unchanging and my shepherd is trustworthy…from there will come my contentment. If I’m called to STAY HOME during the pandemic, I will TRUST MY UNCHANGING SHEPHERD AND STAY HOME. If I’m called out to work because I am an essential worker, I WILL TRUST MY UNCHANGING SHEPHERD AND GO TO WORK.

So What?!

The Allied soldiers gathered many hungry, homeless children after World War II and placed them in large camps. The children were abundantly fed and cared for. However, at night they did not sleep well; they seemed restless and afraid. Finally, a psychologist offered a solution. After the children were put to bed, they each received a slice of bread. If they wanted more to eat, they could have it, but this particular slice was not to be eaten—it was just to hold. The slice of bread produced marvelous results. The child would go to sleep, subconsciously feeling there was something to eat tomorrow. That calmed the child.

In Psalm 23 David says, ***“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”*** Instinctively, the sheep knows the shepherd has made plans for its grazing. He knows the shepherd has made ample provision, so he will lie down in peace, with the piece of bread in his hand.[[8]](#endnote-8)

 I would like to move from preaching to meddling for a few minutes. What is the one thing that is separating you from finding this kind of contentment? What is it that you trust? What do you need to hold onto so you can sleep at night? Are we all a little bit like Brennan Manning having enough information to last us a lifetime but learning to trust what we know? Are you like me, doubting when I should be trusting? Do you need the ability to trust that what you’ve read in the Scriptures, prayed in your prayers and heard in church is true? Is the LORD your shepherd? Are you content?

We have a God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, everlasting, and unchanging. We have a God who hears us, we have the love of Christ that died for us and rose again, and we have the power of the Holy Spirit within us. That’s our SO WHAT for today! If only we could learn to fully trust “The Lord is MY Shepherd,” we would have more than enough grace for every sin, more than enough direction for every decision and more than enough healing for our hurts.

“The Lord is my shepherd, that’s all I want!”

Let us pray:

Dear Shepherd of the sheep. We come to You today not because we are good, but because YOU are good. We belong to You. We praise You because You are unchanging, You are the “Great I Am” –YOU are the shepherd who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Let us say with boldness and trust “The Lord is MY Shepherd; I shall not want.” Amen

The Seed Christian Fellowship

Rancho Cucamonga, California 91701

www,theseedchristianfellowship.com

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Pastor Dave Peters

1. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1, Psalms 1-26 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 335 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Max Lucado*, Safe In The Shepherd’s Arms*, (Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2002) 10 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Helen Mallicoat [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Tan, P. L. (1996). [*Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tans7700?ref=Page.p+1524&off=1088&ctx=dy%E2%80%99s+Favorite+Verse%0a~Dwight+L.+Moody%E2%80%99s+fa) (p. 1524). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Tan, P. L. (1996). [*Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tans7700?ref=Page.p+1524&off=571&ctx=6917+Trust+And+OK%0a~I+rather+like+the+smal) (p. 1524). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust,* (Harper: San Francisco, 2002), 5 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). [*1001 illustrations that connect*](https://ref.ly/logosres/1001illconct?ref=Page.p+463&off=154&ctx=4%3b+Philippians+4%3a19%0a~The+Allied+soldiers+) (p. 463). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)