

## The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm – Breakin’ it Down

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The 23rd Psalm is one of the most beautiful things ever written. You will see it on posters, and it is both a prayer and a song. It has been recited hundreds of billions of times in every language by people who love God all over the world. The Psalms were written a long time ago. There are 150 of them in the Bible, and they were written by several authors, among them, King David, and King Solomon. It helps to know a little bit about how the people in Bible times lived in order to fully understand these beautiful songs. I will do my best to explain this to you, as we read this most heart-warming and comforting of all the Psalms:

1. ***"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."***

I try to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior - as much as my sinful nature permits. When I follow the Lord, I am sure that He is watching me, protecting me, and loving me every minute. Jesus takes care of me. I don't need anything else; His grace is sufficient.

2. ***"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters."***

The green grass is lovely; it tickles my feet as I walk in the sunshine of God's perfect love. It is peaceful by the river of the water of life, and the flow of God's grace satisfies my thirst, and fills my heart and soul with the desire to love him more and more each day.

3. ***"He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."***

I have faith in the Lord; a trusting faith that He will bring me peace, even after bad things happen. I trust Him to protect me from those who would hurt me, and that He will always guide me to seek after truth and justice.

4. ***"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."***

This verse is probably the best-known passage in the Bible. It needs a bit of explanation, because it is what is called "a metaphor". It compares the followers of Jesus Christ to a flock of sheep that are well cared for. You see, in the Holy Lands in those times, there were big open meadows of grass that the sheep would graze on. When there are many sheep, the grass is eaten up real fast. Tending sheep is like running a living lawn mower. So in order to have grass to eat, the sheep have to keep moving.

When the shepherds would move the sheep from one field to another, they had to go down into the valleys to get water from the rivers and streams, and the hills had big rocks and trees that wolves, coyotes, and wild dogs could hide behind, so they could jump out and attack a stray lamb and eat it. It was very dangerous to go down into the valleys, but they had no choice; that is where the water is, and they had to go where the grass was growing, and allow the grass on the field they just came from, to grow back. So a herd of sheep is always moving to find fresh grass.

Because the valleys were dangerous, the Psalmist calls it ***"The valley of the shadow [or great risk] of death."*** The flock always knew that the Shepherd was with them. The sheep recognized the sound of his voice. The sheep could see the Shepherd because he was much taller than they were. He was always behind them when they moved, so he could watch to see that none of them wandered away or got into trouble with the wolves and the coyotes that were always hiding on the hills, waiting for the opportunity to attack.

The Shepherd's ***staff*** - the tall walking stick with the crooked end that he always carried, was taller than he was, and it served several purposes. The staff was a tool, with its wide crook at the top, which was used to snare an animal around the neck to pull it out of a swamp, to guide the animal out of the fast-running water of a deep river, or to hook a wolf and pull it off a sheep it was attacking.

The *"rod"* that this verse refers to, was just a short stick - sometimes called a *"flail"*, with a few leather straps on one end, like a whip. It wasn't used to hit or punish, but by swinging it, the Shepherd kept flies and mosquitoes away from himself, and the sheep closest to him. The other end was used to groom the wool on the sheep when they stopped to rest; it was used like an *"Afro-pick"* is used, to get knots and dirt clumps out of the sheep's wool. So you can see why the Psalm says: *"Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."*

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are just like those sheep, moving from one pasture to another as we go through the different things life demands of us. Good or bad, we know the Lord our Shepherd is with us. He comforts us with His love, and we know His words - His voice - as He speaks to our hearts from the pages of the Bible.

5. *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."*

Like the previous verse, this verse is also a metaphor; the *"table"* is the blessings and rewards that come from doing what is right and good in the Lord's sight. And since the table is set before the eyes of the enemy; indeed, in the presence of the enemies, it is like saying that God will lift us up above those who have done us harm, and we will have peace, even with our enemies. *"Anointing"* is another word for rubbing or wiping, so it would be accurate to say "You rub my head with oil".

They didn't have perfume in those days - only fragrant oils. So *"anointing with oil"* is like putting on perfume. In those days, these scented oils were very expensive. For example, the *"oil of spikenard"* that Mary used to anoint Jesus in John 12:1-6 and Mark 14:1-5 cost almost a year's salary.

The *overflowing cup* is like saying that you have everything you need, and everything you could want... it's like saying that you have more blessings than you can handle.

6. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

God sometimes allows things to happen to us in order to test us - to see if we will love Him and trust Him enough to let Him guide us. In the end, though, he will always make things right - even better than before (read the book of Job). Do you remember the story of Abraham and Isaac? Well, if we love Jesus more than any ONE, or any THING, we will live in the house of the Lord in heaven, forever.

*"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."* - John 10:11 (KJV)

*"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."* - John 10:14 (KJV)

God bless, and Godspeed,



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