

On September 11, 2001, my associate Niel was working at a convention for Glaxo Smith Kline in Las Vegas when the planes hit the World Trade Center. Knowing that Niel was an ordained minister, the producers of the show asked him to lead the group of about 1,500 people in scripture and prayer. Niel read the Psalm, that was part of our Psalter this morning – the 23rd Psalm.

The 23rd Psalm is held in high esteem by the three major religions of the world – Christianity, Judaism and Islam, so he knew that he would be covering most of his bases. But that is not why he choose it.

The 23rd Psalm is one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture and deservedly so. It is a Psalm that clearly and precisely tells us of God's care for His children. It tells us that our God knows what is happening to us. It is also a Psalm, that looks forward to the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, as we saw in our Gospel lesson this morning.

Let's take a look at this Psalm this morning. Notice right away David makes a declarative statement – 23:1: *"The LORD is my shepherd;"* The theme of Lord as our Shepherd is common to the Old Testament. It depicts God as protector, guide and constant companion. For example we read in Genesis 48:15: *"And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,"*

And then, just a few Psalms later in 28:9, the Psalmist talking about the Lord's relationship to his people says: *"Save Your people, And bless Your inheritance; Shepherd them also, And bear them up forever."*

We saw it in our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 40:11: *"He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young."* And also in Ezekiel 34:11,12: *"For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day."*

The next statement is also declarative, in that it tells that because God is our Shepherd, we shall lack nothing – *"I shall not want."* Just as God provided for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, He provides for those of whom is the Shepherd.

God has promised to provide all our needs. Philippians 4:19 says: *"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* Now, obviously God has not promised to provide all our wants, but simply our needs, as a shepherd provides for the needs of the sheep that are under his care.

And it is what we read in the rest of this beautiful Psalm that we see what some of those needs are. As we continue: 23:2: *"He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters."*

The sheep need basic things to survive – a safe place to sleep, food and water. This is what a shepherd provides for the sleep under his care. God, as the shepherd provided this for the sheep under His care. The shepherd would find for them a field where they could graze and water that they could drink, and at night would provide a sheepfold where they would be safe – and we will see more in a few minutes.

But as the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness, God provided for them. And as they obeyed Him, He provided for them – He then gave them a land flowing with milk and honey – the land of Israel.

For those of us who know the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has promised to provide our needs also. We can trust him to do just that. Again, not all our wants, just our needs. We don't go to bed hungry, unless we are on a diet. We don't have to fear for our safety and we have enough to eat – in my case, too much.

23:3: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.” This verse looks forward to the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's provision was not only for their temporal needs, but also for their spiritual needs.

For the children of Israel, God was their King. And as long as they looked to Him in faith He provided for them. We can read through the Old Testament Scriptures for all the saints who had faith – although it was a limited faith – in God and the coming Messiah. We think of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David and the prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha and there are a multitude of others. And God provided for them all because He was their shepherd.

Now, as Christians, we who know that the Messiah has come and again, we know that God has promised to provide all things necessary for us for life and salvation. We read in 2 Peter 1:3: *“as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,”*

This verse tells us that he provides both our temporal need and spiritual needs. In the Sermon on the Mount our Savior tells us that God provides the temporal needs of all – Matthew 5:45: *“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

We call this common grace – that God provides the sun and rain even for those who don't believe in Him. But again, this is only a temporary blessing – it only lasts as long as we are here on earth.

But our spiritual needs – specifically, the salvation of our souls is provided through the “Good Shepherd” – the Lord Jesus Christ — who as we read in our Gospel lesson, gave his life for the sheep. John 10:11: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”*

This is the opposite of what would happen to a real shepherd. If he left the sheep they would be in danger. But our Savior, as left us provided salvation for those who would believe in him.

This is exactly what we see in the next verse – 23:4: *“Yea, 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.”*

As the shepherd led the sheep through different area to find them a place to graze and water to drink, they were open to predators – both animal and human. The shepherd protected them in all situations, just like the good shepherd protects us.

In the next verse we see the extent of the shepherds protection. 23:5: *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.”* If your think about it, this is a very

descriptive verse. If one is in the presence of enemies, he usually eats on the run, if at all.

Here David says that in the presence of his enemies, God, as the Shepherd, prepares a banquet table – where he can recline and enjoy the feast. And not only is there a great feast, but those under the Shepherd are treated as honored guests – they are anointed with oil and given more than enough wine. So we see two things – the provision of his needs and the protection from God.

And there are those beautiful concluding words — 23:6: “*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.*”

While God does not promise us a bed of roses for our lives, as His children we know there will be moments of great blessing from Him – *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life*. Through the variety of life’s trials and tribulations we know that our God is with us – we know that His goodness and mercy will always be there, and we can count on that.

Then we have the conclusion of it all – *And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever*. What better conclusion can there be. When this earthly life is over – with all that has transpired – blessings, disappointments, sadness, trials and tribulations we know the end: *And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever*.

What better ending can there be.