

If

the LORD

is my

Shepherd





You may know very little about the Bible. Perhaps you don't even have one. Whatever your religious background you will probably know the twenty third Psalm.

**The LORD is my shepherd
I shall not want.**

**He makes me lie down in green pastures:
He leads me beside the still waters.**

He restores my soul:

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

**Yes, 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 mine enemies:

You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and
I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

It is commonly read or sung on three occasions in life: at births, deaths and marriages. It is the psalm of comfort and reassurance. That is precisely what it was intended to be. It speaks of happiness in life, death and eternity.



Happiness in life – “I shall not want.”

The way it speaks of happiness in life is found in the words of psalm, “I shall not want.”

"True happiness is impossible to find." These words of Tony Hancock, the comedian, who committed suicide, are a tragic reminder that behind the smiling face can be an aching heart. They are matched in their misery by the comment of a multi-millionaire who said, "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

What do we most need?

We need forgiveness for what we have been. We need a new power to make us what we should be. We need assurance for the future. If the Lord is your shepherd you will have them. He came into the world to take the punishment for sin by His death on the cross. He is alive to help us live as we ought, and He assures us that when we believe in Him, we will be with Him for ever.

Happiness in death – “I will fear no evil.”

The way this believer speaks of being ready to die and even to anticipate it without fear is in the words, “I will fear no evil.

"Someone up there has got something against me." That has been said many times,

whether through bereavement, unemployment, collapsed plans, or destroyed hopes.

All the time there is that thought of the future. The one who has the Lord as their shepherd knows that whatever cloud falls over them, it is only a shadow. Even death is a shadow of its former, horrific self for those who are safe in Christ.

A bee flew round the little girl. She screamed in fear. Granddad put out his hand. The angry bee landed and stung him. He now reassured the girl that the sting was gone. There was nothing left to fear.

The Bible states clearly that the sting of death is sin. The Lord Jesus died on the cross. He was punished in place of others. After death He rose from the grave. Those who now ask Him to become their saviour and shepherd know that the sting and fear of death is gone. He "pulled" the sting of it at the Cross where He died.

I once visited an older Christian man who was dying. "What do you think of Jesus Christ now?" I asked him. "He's a wonderful saviour," were the last words he was able to say. Within a few hours he died. That is what I mean by happiness in death - that quiet assurance that all is well because of salvation through Jesus Christ.

An older believer in the church I attend prays each evening and includes in her prayer these words, "Lord, I am ready if you take me home to be with You this night." When you know your past is forgiven, you are able to face meeting the Lord with tranquillity.

Happiness forever – "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The psalm ends with words which show eternity stretching out forever. For the believer it is a wonderful prospect.

The Lord Jesus is such a great saviour. He is able to take those who are so unfit to even stand before God, and so forgive and change them that they will be with Him forever, in heaven.

Sometimes people think it is arrogant and presumptuous for Christians to say they are sure of heaven. 3000 years ago King David, despite his sins, had no doubt that he would know happiness forever. The Lord who created him, he knew would come into the world to give His life for Him. He would rise and rule over the world. Even before Christ came, David knew that He was his Saviour. The Lord was His shepherd.

What is the loveliest word in the sentence "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"? Surely it is the word 'forever'. Once the believer has passed from life and through death, they will be happy forever.

If...

Did you notice the 'if' on the cover title?

All this and more is true if the Lord is your saviour and shepherd, but what "If not ..."? What if it is not true of you? It would have to read, "The Lord is *not* my shepherd"? What does this psalm say if the Lord is not *my* shepherd?

If the Lord is *not* my shepherd, "I shall *not* want", becomes "I shall want."

The one thing necessary for a happy life is missing. We are left to our own devices. We have to begin the fruitless search for another way of forgiveness. Where else can power over sin to be found? What assurance of the future can there be without the Lord as one's personal shepherd?

If the Lord is *not* my shepherd, "I will fear *no* evil", becomes "I will fear evil."

Someone "up there" *has* got something against you. A friend, who often argued against Christianity, once admitted frankly when speaking of death, "It's not how you go that matters, it's where you're going to."

Without Christ as saviour there are two other courses open. Either to forget about death as morbid, and to think it will somehow get sorted out in it's own good time, or to force a self-confident, "It will be alright - there's nothing to worry about."

This psalm, that gives so much comfort to those who have trusted the Lord Jesus tells us otherwise. Those who are honest enough to realise that they will meet a holy God unforgiven have every cause for disquiet when they consider the end of life.

If the Lord is *not* my shepherd, "I will dwell...", becomes "I will *not* dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Most people will admit that they believe in the day of judgment. They believe that certain categories of sinner deserve to go to hell, but will not admit what is taught consistently in the Bible, that even one sin brings this penalty.

This psalm spells it out for us. Heaven is for those who can truly say, "The Lord is my shepherd." He has died for them - they have believed in Him and are forgiven from everything that has deserved hell. He has guided them in their life. He has comforted them in their death, and after, He will receive them into the glory of heaven.

The alternative is awful and unthinkable. The difference is not that those in heaven are better than those in hell. They are quite simply forgiven. There came a time in their life when they turned from their sin and asked the Lord Jesus to save them. He became their saviour.

The worst word in this last sentence of the Psalm for those who do not trust Christ is "*forever*".

Once a person has missed heaven, it is for ever. There is no change afterwards. There is no purgatory where lesser sins are punished for a while. There is no coming back for a second chance at life. It is a final, tragic and irreversible personal disaster.

One other verse in the Bible sums up human beings in this way. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." God has provided for forgiveness.

In the New Testament of the Bible Jesus stated, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." (John's Gospel chapter 10 verse 11)

The hymn "There is a green hill far away", puts it like this,

**He died that we might be forgiven;
He died to make us good:
That we might go at last to Heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.**

The good shepherd is seeking the lost sheep. Call out to him in prayer. Ask Him to save you. Turn from your sins back to Him. Make sure that when this psalm is next read for you, it carries the message of happiness in life, through death and then forever in eternity.



David Harding