

THE BELIEVER'S COMFORT

PSALM 23 • TV-448B

A television broadcast sermon delivered
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14TH, 1993

By
HENRY T. MAHAN

Transcribed, edited and published
FEBRUARY 14TH, 2020

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Zebulon Grace Church
6088 Zebulon Highway
Pikeville, KY 41501
PH: 606-631-9053

Psalm 23

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. 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. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth 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 the ministry of God’s preacher to be faithful in preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord sent His disciples out to preach He said, *“You go into all the world and you preach the Gospel.”*

Paul said, *“Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.”* It’s our responsibility to preach the Gospel and I’ve been preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God, the Gospel of God’s grace, the Gospel of God’s glory, and the Gospel concerning His Son. I’ve been trying to faithfully preach that all these years on this broadcast.

And then, also, it’s the ministry of God’s preacher to teach the people of God the things of Christ. You know, He told them to, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”* We are to go and make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them.

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And I've tried to do that. I've tried to go verse by verse through the Scripture and I've tried to get some of you to follow in the Scripture to, "*See if these things be so,*" study the Word.

I've written commentaries, I've written commentaries from **Romans chapter 1** all the way to the last verse of **Jude**. Many of you have them. If you don't have them write and we will send them to you. You can buy the six volume commentaries of the 21 epistles in the New Testament. I've taken you through the Old Testament. I've tried to teach you, teach you the things of God.

One time Spurgeon asked a man; he said, "Well what do you believe?" He said, "I believe what my pastor believes." And he said, "What does your pastor believe?" He said, "Well, he believes what I believe." And Mr. Spurgeon said, "Well what do you and your pastor both believe?" He said, "The same thing."

And that's about all most people know; they're not taught in the Word of God, they're not taught in the things of God. Now God's preacher will preach the Gospel and he'll be a teacher, pastor, teacher. He'll teach people the things of God.

But also, there's another ministry that God's preacher has; it is the ministry of God's preacher to comfort the people of God, to comfort them in their trials, and comfort them in their troubles.

Over in **Isaiah chapter 40** the Lord said to Isaiah; "*Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith the Lord. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, (that is, to the church) and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she hath received double for all her sins.*" Her sins are all put away and forgiven. Comfort my people.

So that's a three-fold ministry of God's preacher, he is to preach the Gospel, declare the Gospel of Christ. He's to teach the people the things of God and take the things of Christ as the Spirit of God gives us wisdom and teach the people that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, that they may grow to maturity, that they be not children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine that comes their way.

And then to comfort them. God's people are in much need of comfort. I enjoy the ministry of comfort because I stand in need of comfort. I stand in need of rest. I stand in need of peace.

And as I speak the words of assurance and comfort to God's people, when I prepare a message of comfort, a message of peace, a message of rest, and a message of assurance for those along the way and I too am strengthened. So I enjoy the ministry of comfort.

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Now I would not encourage any person in false faith. And I don't mean to do that. I don't ever mean to encourage anyone in false faith. And I don't mean to speak, "*Peace, peace, when there is no peace.*" God deliver us from ever giving any man assurance who has no faith and confidence in Christ Jesus.

But I can tell you this, at all times being a pastor; I've pastored the same church almost 40 years and nearly all the time my brothers and my sisters are going through some deep, deep, water and some heavy, heavy, trials, at this time, right now, and they need to be comforted. God's people need to be comforted.

And I know there's a time for rebuke, there's a time for exhortation, there's a time for instruction, and there's a time for all these things but there's a time to comfort. And that's what I want to do today.

I want you to just pull up your chair now and sit down there and listen to me. If you're a child of God, if you're a believer, if you're resting in Christ Jesus, then let me bring you a message of rest and a message of comfort and a message of assurance.

And I want to turn for this message to a most familiar Scripture, most familiar. I imagine that this passage of Scripture has been in print more than any other single passage of Scripture in the Bible.

I have held a lot of funerals and I've been to a lot of funerals, every funeral home, almost every funeral has this Scripture on the back of the little paper that they put out with the deceased name, birthday, day of death and the minister who holds the service for the family.

On the back will be the **23 Psalm**. You've seen it; I started to say, thousands of times, but hundreds of times, **23 Psalm**. It is just so familiar. In fact, I'm afraid too familiar.

Let's read it again and let's don't read it like we have read it so many times. Let's don't read it as those who know it. You say, "I know that Psalm." But I don't want you to read it that way; I want you to read it as one who knows that Shepherd. There's a difference.

A lot of people know the Psalm who don't know the Shepherd. But I'll tell you, to know the Shepherd makes the Psalm infinitely, infinitely, more blessed.

I heard a story one time, years ago, about some people that had a dinner, a huge dinner party. And the main speaker was an old veteran missionary, preacher of the Gospel. There were hundreds of people there.

And he spoke for a little while to the people and then when he finished speaking he closed his message quoting the **23 Psalm**. He said, "The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters."

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He went on with that **23 Psalm** and people began to weep, tears began to flow. When he finished there was no clapping, there was no applause, and there was not a word.

There was a man was sitting next to a well-known actor, and he turned to that well-known actor and he said to him; he said, "My friend; I've heard you quote that Psalm many times but it's never had the effect it had just then when that preacher quoted it. What's the difference? Tell me the difference. I have heard you quote it. You can articulate it eloquently and I've heard you quote it but it's never had that effect on people." And the actor turned to his friend and he said, "Well, the difference is this; I know the Psalm, that fellow knows the Shepherd." And I'm telling you my friend, that's the difference."

And I fear that familiarity with some of these precious Scriptures, causes us to pass by and overlook and miss the blessings that are there and the comfort that's there. I can tell you honestly and truthfully from an old preacher that's been around a while. My single source of comfort is the Word of God, not the words of men and not the encouragement of friends. I mean my single source of assurance, my single source of comfort, my single source of confidence is "He hath said I'll never leave you, I'll never forsake you, so that I can boldly say then the Lord is my helper."

But I can't say anything till He says it first. And the more familiar I am with what He says the more confidence I have. So let's look at it, will you, want to, **verse 1, Psalm 23:** "*The LORD is my shepherd I shall not want.*"

There it is! That's all my testimony, "*The LORD is my shepherd.*" That's all my hope, that's all my assurance, and that's all my comfort, "*The LORD.*"

Now, not a God, not somebody up there who likes me, not some God; I'm talking about the one living, true, Lord of heaven and earth, Jehovah, God my Saviour. He's my Shepherd, the almighty one, the all-powerful one, the all sufficient one.

He was my Shepherd before the world began. He said, "*He was the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*" That's how long He's been my Shepherd, before the world began, through the everlasting covenant.

He was my Shepherd before I knew He was my Shepherd. For 2,000 years ago He said; "*Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them I must bring.*" And one day He brought me. He prophesied a long time ago that He was my Shepherd.

He's my shepherd now and He'll always be my shepherd because He said, "*My sheep hear my voice and they follow me. And I give them eternal life and they'll never perish. And nobody is ever going to pluck them out of my hands. My Father gave them to me and nobody's going to pluck them out of His hands either.*" Do you see that, the Lord? I

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wouldn't have any less of a Shepherd than the Lord, the all sufficient, almighty, sovereign Lord.

He's my Shepherd. I don't know whether He's your Shepherd or not. I hope He is. But He's mine, my shepherd. What is He, my owner? I'm His sheep. I belong to Him. He's not my co-pilot, He's not my partner, He's not my inspiration; He's my shepherd.

You see, the Father gave me to Him. *"He bought me with His own blood. He purchased me and called me."* He's my Shepherd. I'm a dumb, wondering, sheep and He's my Shepherd. He has to find a place for me to eat and sleep and care for me. I can't care for myself because He's my Shepherd.

I don't want to care for myself. If He wants to feed me or try me He's still my shepherd. If He wants to share me or slay me He's still my shepherd. If He wants to hold me close or let me wonder; He's still my Shepherd.

If He wants to honor me or embarrass me He's still my Shepherd and I'm His sheep to do His bidding. And I want it that way. *"My times are in His hands"* and my God, I want them there.

Not so long ago we were down in Mexico and we went up on top of a mountain to preach in a very isolated village. It was at night. We drove a four-wheel-drive truck. It was a dangerous road. It took an hour and a half or two hours to go 12 miles.

And we got up there and it came a terrible rain and a storm. And the roads going back were going to be awfully, awfully, treacherous and dangerous. I was there and two of the Lord's missionaries were there with me.

But let me tell you something, I felt very comfortable and unafraid and I'll tell you why, not because I'm important, not because I have great faith, but I'll tell you why; I have a great Shepherd, a sovereign Lord, and He's my Shepherd.

And I'll tell you this, He's not going to let anything happen to me until He wills for me to leave here and I know that. If He wills for me to leave this earth off a top of a mountain I'll leave. But if He wills me to leave from my living room, I'll leave from there. I'm just as safe on that mountain as I am in that living room.

I'm immortal till my Shepherd decrees for me to leave here and I believe that. You see, He is my Shepherd. There's no question about that. And that's where you get your comfort, rest, and peace.

It's not that you have a great deal of faith but you have faith in a great Lord. It's not the strength of your faith; it's the strength of the object of your faith. That's what I'm trying to say to you. *"The LORD is my shepherd and I shall not want."*

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Now there may be days of difficulty and days of trial and days of trouble but I shall never want or lack for anything that's for my good, my eternal good, and needful for my welfare.

I think of old Belshazzar there in the Palace. He violated God's law and the fingers of a man's hand appeared on the wall writing; "*Belshazzar thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting.*" That's an awful thing, wanting and lacking before God.

Not me, not you. If Christ is your Shepherd, if the Lord's your Shepherd, you shall not lack. Anything you need eternally, spiritually, for your soul's welfare; you'll never want. "*In Him are all things. You're complete in Him.*" My needs are supplied. I don't have all my wishes but I have my needs met. "*I shall not want.*"

You know, David who wrote this Psalm, walked every path you'll ever walk. When I was preparing this message I thought about David. He said, "*The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want.*"

This was true when he was a young shepherd himself tending his father's sheep. "*The LORD is my shepherd,*" he said. This was true when as a young warrior he fought the enemies of Israel on the battlefield, "*The LORD is my shepherd.*"

It was true when he fled for his life from the wrath of Saul hiding in caves and woods and forests, "*The LORD is my shepherd.*" It was true when he took the throne of Israel and all the heavy responsibility of leadership descended upon his shoulders and everybody started looking to him; he said: "*The LORD is my shepherd.*"

It was true when he fell into sin and the judgment of God came upon his home. It was true when he grieved over his children and cried; "*O Absalom, Absalom, my son Absalom; would God I had died for you.*" The Lord was his Shepherd then.

It was true in old age when he lay down to die and he said: "*The Lord hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. And this is all my salvation and all my desire, for the LORD is my Shepherd.*"

And then look at the next verse; talk about comfort; "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*" What are these green pastures? He makes me to lie down, to be at rest, to be at peace in my thoughts.

Our lives are made up of two things mainly, thoughts and deeds, meditation and action. Most everything will fall under one of those two, thoughts or deeds, meditation or action.

Now in thoughts and meditation; He makes me to be at rest and peace in my thoughts and to lie down in green pastures. What are these green pastures? His Word; I can lie down, feed upon, and find comfort in His Word.

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I wonder sometimes why all this yelling and screaming and shouts of war. You know, sometimes I will turn the television on. My wife and I, Doris, and people start yelling and screaming at each other. I just turn it off. I can't stand this yelling and screaming and violence and shouts of war.

Why all of this? Lie down, be still, and know that I am God, and rest. Blessed quietness; let's covet a quietness of spirit. Lie down in the Word of God. You'll find everything right there in the green pastures. Just lie down like a sheep in those green pastures of promises and feed on them. It's going to be ok; it's going to be all right.

I never will forget years ago a dear mother; her daughter got pregnant, not married. The mother was devastated, the father was devastated, the daughter was devastated, and everybody was devastated.

They came and talked to me. I was in another city holding a meeting and they are just thinking, "Life is over." That's the way they felt, "It's just over, everything's over." I said, "Now wait a minute! This is tragic and it's a trial and its great trouble but let me tell you something. You're a people of God and it's going to be all right. Believe me and just don't say anything you will be sorry for. Just don't start popping off and yelling and screaming. Stop it, settle down and wait on the Lord. It's going to be all right."

Well, after the daughter was married and a beautiful baby came along; about two years later I was down there in a meeting and the new grandmother was smiling and happy. I went by and put my arm across her shoulder and I said, "Told you it was going to be all right."

"All things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Why do we have to have all this disagreement and division and conflict? Lie down. *"He makes me lie down in green pastures."*

"He leads me beside still waters." You know, the trials of life are called "deep waters." I've been through some of them. I know what I'm talking about. Troubled waters, deep waters; the waves of the sea, just seems like the next one is going to take you right on down with it.

But let me tell you something, the Lord's my Shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in the pasture of promises and then He leads me beside waters that He has stilled.

He was lying in that boat that night and the raging sea was tossing that little boat and His disciples came back and said, "Lord; don't you care if we die?" And He got up and came to the front of that bow of that little ship and raised His hand and He said, *"Peace be still."*

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And those raging, troubled, waves lay down at His feet like a shepherd dog. *“And He leads me by waters,”* deep waters sometimes and deep trouble, but they're stilled. I didn't still them. My friends didn't still them, He did.

And I'll tell you, when you think of your troubles and your trials never lose sight of this fact, that every trial is sent by Him. Now you let these preachers talk about the devil's power all you want to but the devil has no power at all over God's people without God's permission. God sends our trials and His grace is sufficient for everyone.

Notice this third verse: *“He restores my soul.”* I'm a soul; I'm not a body, I'm a soul. I have a body but I am a soul and *“He restores my soul.”* That means He restores me. He restores me to life. *“In Adam I died.”* He restores me to purity, *“In sin my mother conceived me.”*

He restores me to God, for I was lost. He restores me to power, for I have been made in Him and king and a priest and He restores me daily, for I am still prone to fall. *“He restoreth my soul.”*

And do you know what He tells us in **Galatians 6:1**? He tells us to do the same things for others. He says; *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest I also be tempted.”*

Who restored my soul? He did. Well how did He do that? He died for me. He obeyed the law for me. He intercedes for me. He's my substitute, my Saviour.

“And then He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.” There's a path of holiness which no son of Adam has ever walked, no son of Adam has ever walked, that perfect path of holiness.

But the Son of God who became the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ; He walked that path. He walked it and He walked it on behalf of all of His people. And He has imputed to us that perfect holiness and that perfect righteousness which He accomplished by walking that path. And in Him I walk in paths of righteousness, accepted in the beloved.

**“In the beloved, accepted am I
Risen, ascended, and seated on high.”**

“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.”

Now what is this? I know that nearly everyone considers this, *“Valley of the shadow of death”* to be physical death, but I don't; I don't believe that at all. I believe it refers to

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right now, walking through this world. This world is a world of death, shadows and darkness.

Death to the believer is not unpleasant. Death is carnation. Death is victory. You know; when I die I'm not going to walk through a valley of the shadow of death. When I die I'm coming into the light. I'm going into glory.

So, that's not talking about my death. Even old Balaam said; "Let me die the death of the righteous. Let my latter end be like his." If a believer's lying here on a bed and dying he's not walking through the valley of the shadow of death; he's leaving it.

So, the valley of the shadow of death is right now, what you and I are walking through. This is the valley of death. The fall of Adam brought death and darkness. But watch this, we're walking through it. We're not tarrying. This is not my home. I'm not camping here. I walk through this valley of death.

But notice the word here, shadows, shadows, shadows. This valley of death has only shadows. The shadow of a dog can't bite. It can scare the life out of you. The shadow of a gun can't kill. The shadow of a knife can't cut.

And these fears are just shadows because Christ has taken the substance out of them and the sting out of death. It can't touch you. "*Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I'll fear no evil*", why, because I'm brave? No I'm not brave: "*Thou art with me.*"

"*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I'll fear no evil,*" why, because I have more faith than anybody? No, I don't have that kind of faith. I wish I did. But He's with me. Why should I be afraid when He's with me?

Evil can't control where He controls. Evil can't reign where He reigns. If God be for me, who in the world, can be against me? "*His rod and His staff comfort me. He prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.*"

If you didn't have enemies you wouldn't be like your Lord because He had enemies. What's that table? It's the Lord's Table. "*This is my body broken for you and my blood shed for you. My cup runs over.*"

Surely two bodyguards will follow me all the days of my life: "*Surely goodness and mercy are going to follow me and I'm going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*"

"*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth 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!*"