

Green pastures (Ps. 23)

Part 1

Speaker	W. Moss
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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:01] I am in the book of the Psalms, the Psalm 23.

The book of the Psalms, the 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.

[00:01:07] Thou mountest 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 forever.

The scripture that we read in the prophecy of Ezekiel is a very solemn one.

[00:02:07] And I hesitate to say very much about it this afternoon, partly because I am in no position to make any kind of accusations against anyone else, especially those who are older than I am.

But also because it is the Lord who is speaking in the 34th chapter of Ezekiel, and he is speaking just as much to me as he is to you or to anyone else, old or young.

And I felt it was right to read it, because I believe it's a message from the Lord to us today in 1958.

[00:03:01] And I believe it's a warning to us.

As I go about the country, I talk to many people, many of the Lord's servants, many who are trying to win others, many who are trying to serve him in various ways. And wherever I go, there seems to be the same crying.

What is happening?

Where are all the young people that we used to have years ago in our assemblies, in our churches?

We seem to be getting smaller and smaller. I know there are glorious exceptions. Praise God for every one. And I know that in almost every church, in almost every assembly, there are some young people. Praise God for every one. But not so many as there used to be, and why?

[00:04:04] And there seems to be an air of bewilderment. Is the Lord's hand upon his people in these days? What is wrong?

Because I myself am quite convinced that there are just as many young people being brought to know the Savior as there ever have been.

What's happening to them?

And I wonder whether this message of the Lord through Ezekiel to some of his people in Israel many, many centuries ago is not his living message for us today.

God does work like that.

He speaks in the same language as he used on the spot centuries ago.

He speaks to us today.

And I wonder whether it is because we are not feeding the flock as we ought to be.

[00:05:09] I say we, I speak of any of us who may not be, who may be able to feed, but not feeding the flock.

Who are so engrossed in feeding ourselves, and that's highly necessary, but we are so engrossed in feeding ourselves and enjoying our own food that we neglect to feed the young of the flock.

The result of the neglect to feed a flock of sheep is that they wander and they are scattered. Those are words that the Lord himself uses in the 34th chapter of Ezekiel.

He says they were scattered because there is no shepherd. [00:06:01] My sheep wandered through all the mountains. Yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

Isn't it understandable that if a sheep fails to get the food that he needs, where he expects to find it, he'll go somewhere else where he can find food?

Isn't it a judgment upon, or a warning to the so-called shepherds who are busily engaged in feeding

themselves and neglecting to feed the flock?

You know, the Lord doesn't leave them wandering and scattered. The Lord still has his eye upon them. The Lord is the good shepherd, and the Lord doesn't fail them, even if we do.

[00:07:03] The Lord goes on to say, I will seek them out.

He said, I will feed them, and so he does, thank God. He never loses one of his sheep. They are fed, but maybe not through us.

There's another thing I've noticed going about and talking to people on these lines. I've noticed how often people of about my age refer to one, two, three names of older men who've now died, and who've been a terrific blessing to them.

Obviously shepherds of the highest order, and their names are constantly being mentioned by quite different people in different parts of the country. What wonderful men of God they must have been. I wish I knew, but I didn't.

[00:08:02] Evidently they were shepherds. Evidently they are the reason for there being so many kids of my age about today. What a wonderful thing to be able to look back upon. But why have we got to look back upon it? Thank God there are men today who are shepherds. Would to God there were more.

Because I believe that is the only way to stop sheep from wandering.

It's to feed them.

To feed them with the food they need, the food they must have in their Christian life. And if we fail, then they will naturally, and who can blame them, they will naturally wander until they find the food that is provided for them.

Now, the Lord is capable of feeding his sheep directly.

And he very often does.

[00:09:02] But I believe normally he prefers to use under-shepherds to do the feeding for him. Those whom he's trained and those whom he guides to do the feeding. You may say, why does he do that? I refuse to question why he does it. I think it's wonderfully gracious of him, the good shepherd, the chief shepherd, as he's also called, to deign to use men and women for whom he's died, sinners, who have been brought to himself and cleansed by his precious blood to use them as his under-shepherds. What a wonderful privilege to be used by him like that. I think that's the way he likes to work, through under-shepherds. I wonder, some of you younger ones particularly, is it your ambition to be a shepherd? [00:10:04] And there seems to be an air of bewilderment.

Is the Lord's hand upon his people in these days?

No. Because I myself am quite convinced that there are just as many young people being brought to know the Saviour as there ever have been.

What's happening to them?

And I wonder whether this message of the Lord, through Ezekiel, [00:11:03] to some of his people in Israel many, many centuries ago, is not his living message for us today.

God does work like that.

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And I wonder whether it is because we are not feeding the flock as we ought to be.

I say we, I speak of any of us who may not be, who may be able to feed, but not feeding the flock, who are so engrossed in feeding ourselves, and that's highly necessary, but we are so engrossed in feeding ourselves and enjoying our own food that we neglect to feed the young of the flock.

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There's another thing I've noticed going about and talking to people on these lines. I've noticed how often people about my age refer to one, two, three names [00:14:05] of older men who've now died, and who've been a terrific blessing to them.

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To feed them with the food they need, the food they must have in their Christian life. And if we fail, then they will naturally, and who can blame them, they will naturally wander until they find the food that is provided for them.

Now, the Lord is capable of feeding his sheep directly. And he very often does.

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Well, I'm afraid we laughed, and we said, that's not the way to get into a public school, believe me. They don't train people to be shepherds. They train them to be businessmen or scientists or professors or teachers, but not shepherds.

Whether he got in or not is not the point. The point is, just at that moment, for some reason or other, it was his ambition to be a shepherd. We found out why it was. He'd been talking to a man who was digging the garden for us, who had been a Welsh shepherd on the hills and had told him all about the sheep and rather fired his imagination for the time being. But I wonder if we were right to laugh when we looked more deeply into it. [00:18:03] I've often thought since then, it's my ambition to be a shepherd too. Not on the Welsh hills necessarily, but perhaps on the Bumley hills or the Catford hills. A shepherd for the Lord, an under-shepherd for him. Is it your ambition?

I wonder, what are the qualifications for an under-shepherd? What are the qualifications for a shepherd of the Lord's sheep? I think in the 23rd Psalm, we get an idea of what those qualifications might be. I'm not going right through the psalm, because my subject, as you know, is green pastures. And I'm only going to talk about the first two verses. It's a wonderful thing to me how often the Lord, in his dealings with Israel, his people right down the ages, chose men who were shepherds. [00:19:04] Literally shepherds, who looked after four-legged sheep. How often he chose men who were shepherds. Moses, for many, many years, kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, in Midian. The whore of the mount of God.

Remember Amos, one of the prophets, was a shepherd. I think I'm right in saying that. There were many others through the scriptures who were shepherds, and God chose them. David himself, who wrote this psalm, we believe, was a shepherd. And I believe the Lord had a purpose in that. He didn't use the simile or metaphor of shepherd and sheep when speaking about his people without reason. And I believe God saw that there were many qualifications for looking after ordinary four-legged sheep, [00:20:03] which could be useful to him in looking after his own people. And I think one of the

chief qualifications for being a shepherd is to know what it is to be a sheep. You may think that's double-dutch, but it isn't.

To know what it is to be a sheep and have a shepherd of your own is, I think, one of the essential qualifications of being a shepherd yourself. David began his psalm by saying, The Lord is my shepherd.

He could have said, I am a shepherd in my own right. I have all the training, I'm skilled, I flew a lion and a bear. He told King Saul on the occasion, demanded it, all about it, about when he was in the presence of the Lord. He said, The Lord is my shepherd.

I myself am a sheep.

[00:21:04] And David knew something about sheep. He knew something about their wanderings and their foolishness. And he knew something about the duties of a shepherd and the love which a shepherd has, a real shepherd has for his sheep. He knew something about those, and I believe he turned it the other way around and applied them to his own Lord. The Lord is my shepherd.

David needed a shepherd of his own.

And so today, shepherds, the Lord's shepherds, and would-be shepherds, need him.

And we can't do anything about it unless we realize from the other side of the qualifications of the shepherd. [00:22:02] The tenth of John, the Lord Jesus himself, speaking about the good shepherd, he said, He leadeth them out.

David was conscious of being led by his shepherd. He goeth before them.

And David was conscious that the Lord was opening up his pathway before him. And he needed to be conscious of that too. The Lord Jesus said, And they shall go in and out and find pasture. And that really brings us to our second verse, doesn't it? He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

There are various ways of looking at the idea of green pastures. Some people seem to think that if you're in green pastures, [00:23:05] everything's plain sailing, everything's going beautifully, all's right with the world, nothing to worry about. Green pastures.

Well, I don't think it means that at all in this connection. I don't think it means plain sailing. I don't think it means merely an easy life. I do believe it means life, a life with the shepherd, constantly with the shepherd.

It's the shepherd who seeks out the green pastures. It's the shepherd who leads his sheep there. And if we are to be constantly in the green pastures, we've got to be constantly with the shepherd. And there's the whole point. Oh, there are many people today who, plenty of material blessings, well off, nothing to worry about financially, nice house, [00:24:01] lovely family, business thriving, everything to thank God about, materially, but they forget the Lord.

Sometimes even Christians can be led away by material blessings. Thank God many with them use them for the Lord, as I believe he intended them to do as his stewards. Thank God for everyone who does that. But it's so very easy when life is going on sweetly to forget the Lord.

That's what happened to Israel. Lest when thou hast eaten but not full, thou forget the Lord thy God, and it's exactly what they did. When things were going easily and well for them, they tended to forget the Lord their God who brought them their blessings. So material blessings don't mean green pastures. On the other hand, one knows many, many people [00:25:02] who were having a very hard life, in one way or another, hard financially maybe, or perhaps they're subject to some illness, things have gone wrong in various ways in their family life, and they're going through what we might call very deep waters, yet many, many a time those people are really in the green pastures and beside the still waters.

I was talking to our beloved Mr. Beatty only two or three days ago in Carlisle, and I thought, well, here, I will mention his name, here is a man who has been through waters deeper than any of us have ever been through probably in some ways, physically, and yet, to be with him for a day or two is a real uplift.

You've met men of God like that [00:26:02] and women of God like that who have had terrible trials, terrible difficulties, and they've lived so near to the Lord through them that they're still able to be shepherds to those with whom they come into contact, and what a blessing he has been to so many of us, and certainly to me.

Up there also, we met a man for the first time who'd had a very easy life up to a point, a prudent man, export manager for cars, the biscuit works up there, very good job, traveling all over the world for them, speaks five languages fluently and can make himself understood in three or four hours, a most valuable man with a fine job, everything going sweetly, lovely wife, everything going nicely, attached to Montgomery's staff during the war because of his brilliance at languages, wasn't at the trials in Germany as an interpreter [00:27:01] because of his brilliance, came back, was sent to South America for his firm, and came back a helpless cripple with no use whatever in either of his legs, staggering around painfully and very slowly, difficult to sit down, difficult to stand up, has to be helped and carried by car now everywhere, lost his job, of course.

Well, there was a man who for a time was right down at the bottom of things and right down in the dumps, a Christian man who'd been a preacher in his time and just couldn't understand it and got right under things until God, by his grace, sent him a shepherd who was able to remind him of the goodness of God in so many ways to him. And thank God now he's bright, he's, I was going to say, full of fun. I think I'm right in saying full of fun now. He's preaching again. [00:28:01] I don't know how he gets to the places where he preaches. Somebody takes him there. He's preaching the gospel. Well, now, there's a man, surely, in terrible circumstances, terrible trial, with little or no hope of ever getting better, who's living in the green pastures and beside the still waters.

It isn't material blessings that are the green pastures.

I came across a little verse of poetry today.

Some murmur when their sky is clear and wholly bright to view, if but one speck of dark appear in their great heaven of blue.

And some with thankful love are filled if but one streak of light, one ray of God's great mercy gilds the darkness of their light. That's the other way of looking at things, isn't it? Those who are annoyed [00:29:02] when some little black cloud comes across their easy life, others who are thankful to God for one little ray of light in the darkness and the difficulty of their pathway. Well, that gives us some idea, I think, of what are the green pastures. But now, what are they? What are these green pastures? Well, I believe it's not so much our blessings— I've just disproved that, I think, by the illustrations I've given— not so much our blessings, but I believe it's where we learn about our blessings.

And above all, where we learn about the greatest blessing of all, where we learn about Christ himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who went to the cross and died for us, the one who shed his blood in order to bring us to God, the one who is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, all in one, where we learn about him.

And he is our greatest blessing, [00:30:02] the greatest blessing of all. Through him all the other blessings come. I think it's about him that we learn in the green pastures, where we feed.

Somebody once said that in the glory, all the blessings that we— most of the blessings that we now know and for which we thank God, I trust, every day, our material blessings and even many of our spiritual blessings, won't be ours then. We shall no longer need them because we shall have the greatest blessing of all, the blessing through whom all the other blessings come, the Lord himself. We shall be there with him in the glory and we shan't need the others. We've got the best.

Well now, what is the— what are the green pastures then? Well you say to me, [00:31:01] isn't it the study of the scriptures? Well, yes and no.

In many ways, of course, the green pastures can be regarded as the study of the scriptures. But not that alone.

There are many people today who study the scriptures for hours and hours and don't seem to find the green pastures there.

I believe we may say that it's the study of the scriptures to find Christ in them.

And it's only as we find the Lord Jesus Christ in the scriptures that we know what is meant by the green pastures.

I expect some of you here are members of the Scripture Union as I am.

We have been reading a portion of the scripture every day. If you are, then you'll know what is the first question that we're expected to ask ourselves afterwards. When we've read our portion, we're expected to look through our portion [00:32:01] and say to ourselves, now, what have I read about the Lord today? There are other questions, but that's the first, and I think it's the most important. What have I read about the Lord today?

I've heard young people sometimes say, well, I haven't read anything about him. It's all about David, or it's all about the bishops, or all about Absalom or something. There's nothing about the Lord there, isn't there?

You'll very soon, if you look, you will very soon find him in almost every, if not absolutely every, portion of the scriptures that you like to read. If you look for Christ, you will find him.

And the more you get into the habit of looking for him, I believe the easier it is to find him.

And I believe that gives us some idea of what is the green pastures that David spoke about. Occupation with Christ.

Thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Talking to the Lord Jesus.

[00:33:04] And perhaps above all, listening to the Lord Jesus.

Because he speaks to us through the scriptures, and he speaks to us in other ways.

And only if we are listening for his voice shall we hear it.

Only if we are listening anxiously to hear what he has to say to us, determined to take notice of it and act upon it, shall we hear what he has to say.

Occupation with him.

Listening to him.

Somebody wrote that the inwardly exercised man has a greater blessing than the outwardly blessed man.

Think of that.

The one who has an inward exercise about his soul, about the Lord Jesus Christ, is more greatly blessed than the one who's outwardly blessed [00:34:01] with material blessings.

Or even perhaps with spiritual blessings.

So it's important to get to know him.

My shepherd.

Oh you say, I do know him as my saviour. Yes, thank God for that. And you'll praise God for eternity for it, and so shall I. But do you know him as your shepherd?

As the one who leads you? And with whom you want to be as often as you possibly can, all the time, in the green pastures to which he'll lead you. To know him is life eternal.

And I think that goes far beyond the salvation of the soul.

When you come to know him, then you have, of course, eternal life.

Because the life is in his son, the scripture tells us. When we have him, we have eternal life. Same time.

But I think the scripture goes beyond that [00:35:01] when it says that to know him is life eternal.

To know him, to live with him, that really is life.

God's life. Eternal life. And the living of that eternal life. So it's important to get to know him too as our shepherd, my shepherd. As David did when he said, the Lord is my shepherd.

Think for a moment of some of the men of God recorded in the scriptures as having been alone with God.

I believe the Lord used it as their training.

There was Moses himself to whom I've already referred. Moses, who spent what we would call the 40 best years of his life as a shepherd in the desert.

From the time he was 40 when he left the court in Egypt [00:36:02] where he'd been trained in the Egyptian university, I suppose.

He must have been a brilliant man academically at the age of 40.

And he left that and spent the next 40 years when he could have been using his training to further his own interests and become one of the leading men in the country.

He spent the next 40 years as a shepherd in the desert. Why? Because God wanted him to learn what being a shepherd was.

Because God wanted him to be a shepherd for his sheep, the people of Israel.

And so that he might come in those 40 years really to know God.

When he'd learned all of the Egyptian universities and there were brilliant professors there, when he'd learned all that they had to teach him, he still had to learn the alphabet in God's school.

And he learned that [00:37:01] in the desert with the sheep.

Then there were others. There was Elijah.

What was he doing by the book Jireth?

He wasn't prophesying, wasn't talking to the people, he wasn't preaching.

No. He was alone with God.

And God was teaching him. I think he was in the green pastures there, very near to God.

There was Ezekiel.

Chiba.

There was the Apostle Paul who spent, we don't know how long, in Arabia.

Remember Paul said in the epistle to the Galatians, I think it was, that when he, the Lord was gracious to him and the Lord sent him to preach the gospel, he said, I didn't go up to Jerusalem to ask the other apostles, those who were apostles before me. I went into Arabia.

What did he go there for? No doubt whatever, [00:38:01] to ask God.

To ask for his instructions from God.

To get near to him.

To study the scriptures, no doubt for himself, in the light of the wonderful key that he'd come to know, the Lord Jesus.

To study them there, in Arabia, alone with God, in the green pastures, coming to know him.

And then there was John in the Isle of Patmos and how wonderfully God used him and revealed things that we, the most brilliant brains have failed completely to understand, though no doubt we shall one day in the revelation.

And then, there was David himself.

How long did he spend in the cave of Adullam with those who were discontented, exiled, and outcast.

Saul hunting him.

It wasn't a very easy part of David's life.

But he was very near to the Lord there.

I believe the Lord was teaching him a lot of things [00:39:01] during that period of difficulty and trial.

Green pastures don't always look like green pastures. Believe me.

They're very often desert. But, if they're with the Lord, then they really are spiritual green pastures.

The Lord Jesus himself, here we must speak very reverently, but the Lord Jesus himself become man that he might die for you and for me.

Spent some 30 years of his life in private prayer and communion with his father.

Before he engaged on three and a half years of ministry. Ten times as long almost. Ten times as long

in private communion with his father that he might engage in that short period of ministry.

What a lesson to us.

[00:40:01] And there's no doubt whatever that Moses learned far more in the desert than he learned at the court of Pharaoh. And Paul learned far more in Arabia and so on than he learned at the feet of Gamaliel.

You know, nothing, I believe, nothing replaces being alone with God in the green pastures. Where there's food for our souls, where there's no drought.

It's interesting that David couples the green pastures with the still waters. David may decide the still waters.

Where there's still water in a field, the grass around that is pretty lush and plentiful. It doesn't dry up and get brown where there's water around. And there's still waters where the proverb says still waters run deep. And so do the waters [00:41:02] with which we may be refreshed run deep.

Oh, what depths there are in the scriptures for us when we meditate upon them looking for Christ there. What depths there are. And there's no drought there because we're feeding on what? No, we're not feeding on something. We're feeding on somebody. We're feeding on him. We're feeding on the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe the whole of the 23rd Psalm really is pointing to the Lord.

We use it and we can use it and we use it properly in comfort in various ways to those who are dying, to those who are in difficulties and in trouble.

You say the Lord's my shepherd. He's there. He'll be with you.

Everything really points to the Lord, the shepherd. Not to the blessings so much but to the one who gives them. [00:42:02] To the Lord himself.

Well, may we all learn to feed more regularly in the green pastures. To learn more of his gracious dealings with us as a shepherd for his sheep.

And then, well, we shall go out with Christ in our hearts and Christ in our lives. And then we shall be of some use to him. And then the sheep will be fed to the praise and glory of the Lord Jesus and our great God and Father. Amen.