**“You are with me**”Psalm 23:4b

**Good Morning Beloved,**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Anti-psalm 23 David Powlison[[1]](#footnote-1) | Psalm 23 King David |
| *I’m on my own. No one looks out for me or protects me. I’m always restless. I’m easily frustrated and often disappointed.* | *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* |
| It’s a jungle—I feel overwhelmed. | He makes me lie down in green pastures. |
| *It’s a desert—I’m thirsty.* | *He leads me beside quiet waters.* |
| My soul feels broken, twisted, and stuck. I can’t fix myself. | He restores my soul. |
| *I stumble down some dark paths. Still, I insist: I want to do what I want, when I want, how I want.* | *He leads me in paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake.* |
| But life’s confusing.  Why don’t things ever really work out?  I’m haunted by emptiness and futility shadows of death.  I fear the big hurt and final loss.  Death is waiting for me at the end of every road, but I’d rather not think about that. | Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, |
| *I spend my life protecting myself. Bad things can happen.* | *I will fear no evil, for you are with me.* |
| I find no lasting comfort.  I’m alone...facing everything that could hurt me. | Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. |
| *Are my friends really friends?*  *Other people use me for their own ends.* | *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.* |
| I can’t really trust anyone.  No one has my back.  No one is really for me—except me.  And I’m so much all about ME, sometimes it’s sickening.  I belong to no one except myself. | You anoint my head with oil. |
| *My cup is never quite full enough. I’m left empty.* | *My cup overflows.* |
| Disappointment follows me all the days of my life.  Will I just be obliterated into nothingness? | Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the Days of my life, |
| *Will I be alone forever, homeless, free-falling into living death before I die..* | *And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* |
|  |  |

Reading of God’s Word

***23****A Psalm of David.*

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

***2*** *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

*He leads me beside still waters.*

***3*** *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness*

*for his name’s sake.*

***4*** *Even 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.*

***5*** *You prepare a table before me*

*in the presence of my enemies;*

*you anoint my head with oil;*

*my cup overflows.*

***6*** *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

*all the days of my life,*

*and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord*

*forever. [[2]](#footnote-2)*

**Preaching God’s Word**

1. your rod…
   1. How does the shepherd communicate to the sheep?
      1. Or to say it another way… what strengthens the sheep to say… *You are with me.*
         1. In our passage, two instruments… two tools of the shepherd… comfort the sheep.
   2. First… the Rod.
      1. **c.** shepherd’s implement, *club*, ψ 23:4 [[3]](#footnote-3)
         1. It is a tool of authority… strength… and power.
            1. The rod was formed from a sapling…. The part closest to the roots was shaped like a mace that a warrior would use like a club and the trunk was whittled down for a shepherd’s hand to quickly grasp.
         2. “a cudgel warn at the belt”[[4]](#footnote-4)
      2. Don’t think… Charlie Brown “Christmas Carol” where Schermie has his role with Linus as shepherds.
         1. These are not children dressed for a pageant.
      3. Think of a warrior… that needs to strike a cobra… lurking behind a rock.
         1. Using this shorter weapon, a sheep is protected from close attacks as the tool become an “extension of the shepherd’s right hand”.
   3. With the club… or rod… the sheep are protected…
      1. “in the valley of death’s shade… the place of imminent danger (Jer. 2:6), sore affliction (Ps. 44:9), fear and terror (Ps. 107:10), and dreadful darkness (Job. 10:21-22).”[[5]](#footnote-5)
         1. Wolves, leopards, bears, lions (Amos 3:12; Isa. 11:6; Jer. 5:6; 50:17; John 10:12)
         2. Lions… this weapon is the one David probably used against the lion and the bear (1 Sam. 17:34-36)[[6]](#footnote-6)
         3. And other humans (one human shepherd shared how thieves had broken in and stole his whole flock… THREE times).
   4. The ROD… shows The Shepherd as a KING… ruling over and defending his flock… But also his EXAMINATION of the flock.
      1. *Passing under the rod* (Ezekiel 20:37)
         1. Refers to how a shepherd would use his Rod to part the wool of the sheep to see if there were any cuts that could get infected… any pests (ticks) that were hidden… and to ensure that all the sheep were brought into the fold at night for their inspection.
            1. Thus a shepherd could note if there were truly 99 sheep in the fold or 100.
         2. The fame of a shepherd could be tied to how well he could strike an object at a distance…
            1. almost like a dart contest…
            2. Or a shooting contest with a revolver.
      2. POINT: This is symbol of…
         1. Discipline for the family (Pro. 13:24; 1 Cor. 4:21)
         2. AND Protection among the nations (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:9; Isa. 10:15).[[7]](#footnote-7)
   5. Transition: With the rod is…
2. … and your staff,
   1. A doctor as his stethoscope…
      1. A mechanic with his wrench…
         1. A chef with his knife…
            1. A shepherd with his staff.
   2. מִשְׁעֶנֶת (*miš·ʿě·něṯ*): - staff, rod, cane, i.e., a sturdy, about shoulder-height, often personalized, stick branch of a tree,
      1. with many uses, including herding, punishing by striking, a support for walking on rough terrain or with weak legs, etc. (Ex 21:19; Nu 21:18; Jdg 6:21; 2Ki 4:29(2×),31; 18:21; Ps 23:4; Isa 36:6; Eze 29:6; Zec 8:4+)[[8]](#footnote-8)
   3. The ROD conveys defense… the STAFF communicates discipline.[[9]](#footnote-9)
      1. Support the weaker sheep…
         1. One shepherd did not want the newly born ewe to be rejected by the mother due to the smell of human hands on the baby… so he used the staff to pick the ewe up and lead it to the mother
      2. Snag a trapped animal with the crook…
         1. One shepherd shared how sheep had to be rescued from water because they placed themselves on poor footing and fell in.
      3. Redirect a misbehaving member of the herd.
         1. Illustration of the staff…
            1. In talking to an old shepherd he inquired in what sense it could be said that his staff was for the comfort of the sheep. The old shepherd proceeded to explain that in daylight he always carried the staff across his shoulder, and when the sheep saw it, it spoke of the presence of the shepherd, and thus was a means of comfort. On the other hand if night overtook him with the sheep on the mountainside, or if they were caught in a heavy mountain mist so that the sheep could no longer see the staff, then he would lower it, and as he walked he would tap with it on the ground, so that by hearing, if not by sight, the staff comforted the sheep by speaking of the presence of the shepherd.[[10]](#footnote-10)
   4. In David’s day, the head of a tribe was the one who leans on his “staff”.
      1. Numbers 17 represents the unity and solidarity of a people under one staff.
   5. Also, the staff of two prophets revealed God’s care for his people.
      1. #1 – The staff of Moses connected with the Exodus – Ex. 4
         1. ***17****And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”*
      2. #2 – The staff of Elisha connected with resurrection – 2 Kings 4
         1. ***29****He said to Gehazi, “Tie up your garment and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not reply. And lay my staff on the face of the child.”*
   6. POINT: The Shepherd with these two tools guides like a King (Micah 7) and a Prophet (Num. 21).
      1. Application from Westminster Shorter Catechism 88.
         1. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?
         2. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.
            1. Are you privately reading and enjoying the scriptures?
            2. Are you reflecting on your baptism and the invitation of the Table?
            3. Are you praying?
   7. Are you looking for…
      1. the rod of God to protect?
      2. And the staff of God to lead?
         1. It must be both a protective and corrective measure?
      3. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 *-* ***16****All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,****17****that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
3. … they comfort me.
   1. Question: For a sheep… what would be a horrible symbol… or a terrifying sign?
      1. A comforting scene would be a Shepherd leaning on his staff with his hand on his rod.
         1. A distressing sign would be a rod snapped in two next to a broken staff.
   2. In Zechariah 11, the flock of God is doomed for slaughter due to sin.
      1. There are two staffs… Kindness and Unity… BOTH are Broken.
         1. Staff #1 – Favor or Kindness (vs. 10) – the covenant is broken
            1. As a sign of that broken covenant… Zechariah took 30 pieces of silver and threw it into the house of the LORD (vs. 13).

Meaning this is the price of a slave and how valuable the people of God consider him.[[11]](#footnote-11)

* + - * 1. Result… the flock is turned over to a false shepherd who exploit the sheep
      1. Staff #2 – Unity or Union (vs. 14) – the community of people is broken
         1. Vs. 16 - *For behold, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs.*

Result… the justice symbolized by the rod and the comfort communicated with the staff evaporate.

* 1. Beloved, the people of God rejected Zerubbabel, the Lord’s anointed shepherd, in Zechariah’s day…
     1. And the consequences were devastating… they were given a “wicked shepherd” (vs. 17)
        1. The Kindness of God… the compassion among the family of God… these were despised by sheep bent on their own way.
     2. Yet the prophecy does not end in the sheep being oppressed… the wicked shepherd exploiting… and the staffs broken.
        1. The LORD raises up a Good Shepherd in Zechariah 13…
           1. and as a spirit of “favor and supplication” (Zech 12:10-14
           2. and a “cleansing from all sin and uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1)...

The assurance that the flock is restored to God will come when the GOOD Shepherd is struck (Zech. 13:7).

* 1. When the Good Shepherd is struck the result will be…
     1. The Rod of the LORD is pictured as…
        1. 14:9 - ***9****And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one.*
     2. The Staff of the LORD is pictured as…
        1. 14:21 - ***20****And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “Holy to the Lord.” And the pots in the house of the Lord shall be as the bowls before the altar.*

1. Conclusion
   1. Beloved, Zechariah depicts sin as two staffs were broken.
      1. But the reason you can be at peace today is because those passages look forward to when Jesus Christ, your Good Shepherd, died and rose for you.
         1. Zech. 11:13 - *30 pieces of silver thrown into the house of the Lord*
            1. Fulfilled in Matt. 27:9
         2. Zech. 12:10 - *looking on him whom they have pierced*
            1. Fulfilled in John 19:37; Rev. 1:7
         3. Zech. 13:7 - *the shepherd is struck and the sheep scattered*
            1. Fulfilled in Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27
   2. Jesus is the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23…
      1. His Almighty Power to protect is seen in His Rod…
         1. Psalm 2 - ***7****I will tell of the decree:  
            The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;  
                today I have begotten you.****8****Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
                and the ends of the earth your possession.****9****You shall break them with a rod of iron  
                and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”*
            1. POINT: Your Shepherd King will protect you.
      2. His Compassionate Presence to care is seen in His Staff…
         1. Psalm 110 - *The Lord says to my Lord:  
                “Sit at my right hand,  
            until I make your enemies your footstool.”*
         2. ***2****The Lord sends forth from Zion  
                your mighty scepter.*
         3. *Rule in the midst of your enemies!*
            1. The word for scepter is the same word in Psalm 23 for “staff”.

*staff as badge of leader or ruler מַטֵּה־עֹז Je 48:17 (|| מַקֵּל), cf. ψ 110:2[[12]](#footnote-12)*

* + - * 1. POINT: Your Shepherd Prophet will guide you.
    1. His Cleansing Promised to comfort is made known in His Cross.
       1. For you who are in a refining and purifying trial… just as in Zechariah’s day…
          1. The same passage that describes the Good Shepherd struck, depicting Christ on the Cross…

Ends with this word from the LORD….

* + - 1. Zech. 13:9 - *They will call upon my name,  
             and I will answer them.  
         I will say, ‘They are my people’;  
             and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”*
  1. Or to say it another way…
     1. *for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
  2. Nowhere are these benefits more clearly seen than at the Table of our LORD.

1. From David Powlison’s class, “Dynamics of Biblical Change, in 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esv?ref=BibleESV.Ps23.title&off=24&ctx=Lord+Is+My+Shepherd%0a~23%C2%A0A+Psalm+of+David.) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 23:title–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, [*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bdb?ref=BrownDriverBriggs.BDB+987.1&off=590&ctx=%2c+Th+We+Kit+HPS+Bu.+~c.+shepherd%E2%80%99s+implem) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 987. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Derek Kinder, *Psalms 1-72, 111.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, 396.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My own Heart: pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible, 56.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Laniak, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. DBL Hebrew [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kinder, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As quoted in *A Sheep Remembers* by David Calhoun [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Iain Duguid, *Study Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, 165.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, [*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bdb?ref=BrownDriverBriggs.BDB+641.2&off=1466&ctx=%D7%98)+fennel+Is+28%3a27%3b+~staff+as+badge+of+le) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 641. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)