

## “A Royal Invitation”

### Psalm 23

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+23](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+23)

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#### “The Best is yet to come!”

In this day and age you have to be careful how you issue an invitation. The families who are hosting high school graduation parties know the difficulty of deciding who to include and who to exclude. Those persons planning weddings this summer are already struggling over the invitation list. Only a certain number of people can be invited with the cost of a wedding reception being between \$55.00 to \$75.00 a plate. The question is always: “Who will be included and who will be excluded?”

Even something so official as an advertisement for a job opening must be carefully circumscribed to meet the requirements of the law that tells you who can be included and who excluded.

“A business looking for office help put a sign in the window, stating: **“HELP WANTED. Must be able to type, must be good with a computer, and must be bilingual. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer.”**

A short time afterwards, a dog trotted up to the window, saw the sign and went inside. He looked at the receptionist and wagged his tail, then walked over to the sign, looked at it, and whined.

Getting the idea, the receptionist summoned the office manager. She looked at the dog and was surprised, to say the least. However, the dog looked determined, so the manager led him into her office. The dog jumped up on a chair and stared at her. But she explained, “I can’t hire you. The sign says you have to be able to type.”

The dog jumped down, went to the typewriter, and proceeded to type a perfect letter. He took out the page, trotted over to the manager, and gave it to her. The manager was stunned, but then told the dog, “The sign says you have to be good with a computer.”

The dog went over to the computer and proceeded to enter and execute a perfect program that worked flawlessly the first time.

By this time the manager was completely dumbfounded. She looked at the dog and said, “I realize that you are a very intelligent dog and have some interesting abilities. However, I still can’t give you the job.” The dog went over to the sign and put his paw on the sentence about being an Equal Opportunity Employer.

The manager said, “Yes, but the sign also says that you have to be bilingual.”

The dog looked at the manager calmly and said, “Meow.” (GREG JUDIN, *South Africa*)

One of God’s great gifts revealed in Holy Scripture is the truth that God invites every human being on planet earth to join with God in a great banquet of incredible love.

#### God invites you to a banquet!

On this fallen planet we have to worry about who is included in the banquet invitation and who is excluded. However, God’s economy is vastly different than ours. God owns it all. And, God can afford to invite every human being on planet earth to the most wonderful feast that you can ever imagine. Within Psalm 23

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+23](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+23) there is God’s invitation to you. Let’s reread verses 5 and 6.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil;*

*My cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,*

*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (NIV version)*

I invite you to hear these same verses in the 1990’s translation, The Message.

*You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.*

*You revive my drooping head;*

*My cup brims with blessing.*

*Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.*

*I’m back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.*

This theme from Psalm 23 of God's inviting humanity to a joyous banquet is a theme that Jesus used in several of His teaching stories.

- In **Luke 14:15-24**, ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+14:15-24](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+14:15-24)) Jesus tells of a great banquet feast offered by the King. The invited guests rejected the King's invitation giving rather feeble excuses. Then the King issued a new invitation to all of the unclean and outcasts to come and enjoy the six-course banquet already prepared.
- In **Matthew 25:1-13**, ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+25:1-13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+25:1-13)) Jesus tells the story of a wedding feast. Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as such a celebration. The warning in this story is to be prepared to party when the bridal party appears. Some of those invited were not ready and were left behind.

In both of these stories Jesus, like the Psalmist of old, compares the Kingdom of God with a joyous celebration. When Jesus says the Kingdom of God is now available to you, Jesus is inviting you to live life each day filled with the resurrection hope of Christ Jesus including zest, joy, and health. Every day in partnership with Jesus gets better and better! You are invited to celebrate life as God's continuing gift to you now and to enjoy God's banquet feast in Heaven after you die.

There is an old Rabbinic story which captures this celebration reality.

*The Rabbi dies and goes to heaven. He is sitting in the anteroom waiting for his interview with God. He is feeling quite good about his life, but somewhat fearful of this upcoming interview. Therefore, he is thinking back over all that he learned in a lifetime of study. He is preparing himself for the ultimate of final exams. After awhile he is invited into God's Oval Office. God looks at the Rabbi for quite awhile saying nothing. Finally, God asks two questions. "Did you improve life on my planet? And did you have fun?"*

### **Partnership with Jesus Christ is like a six course banquet feast!**

God invites you to enjoy each day. God invites you to live life as a royal banquet each and every day. God invites you to see hope, experience joy, and know peace no matter what the circumstances of your life. The Apostle Paul wrote of this kind of joyful living in his letter to the Philippian Christians. Paul writes,

***"Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean revel in God!" (Philippians 4:4 The Message)***

([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+4:4](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+4:4))

We live in a world where the negative is emphasized. We are bombarded by negative, fear based messages through news magazines, news papers, television and radio news programs. One person in our congregation shared that her attitude improved significantly when she stopped watching the television news. We are surrounded with negative messages and we need to find ways to emphasize the positive truth of God.

Therefore, we need to recapture the attitude of our early Christian foremothers and fathers who lived with joy even in the face of Roman persecution. The source of their incredible joy for life came from an awareness that God walked with them through every situation on earth. They were not alone. The Good Shepherd was with them. And, because the Good Shepherd was present they had a hope that something better was coming. Therefore, when they gathered for weekly worship they celebrated the resurrection power of God.

- Life for the early church was not somber, sober, solemn, sanctified, orderly, predictable, and sanitized of all emotion.
- Life for the early church did not have the British quality of the stiff upper lip.
- Life for the early church was a celebration of their new life in the Spirit of God who could raise Jesus from the dead.

They came together on the first day of each week to celebrate the resurrection power of God. In worship and in everyday life, the early Christians celebrated the eternal power of God's Kingdom that was alive within them! My friend, life in the Easter tradition is celebration! We are Easter people! We believe that no matter what happens to us today, the best is yet to come!

### **Celebrate God's presence in your life everyday!**

Psalm 23 is the powerful model for how to live with Christ every day of the week! Psalm 23 has blessed the hearts of millions of people for over 3 thousand years because this poem captures the daily hope of God's presence in

your life. King David wrote of the presence of our loving God in all the different stages of life. Listen once again to this meaningful poem:

### ---“The Lord is my Shepherd”---Quartet

Can you hear the different life stages in this great Psalm? Can you picture walking through those stages in your own life? As individuals and as a church we walk through the stages that King David points out to us in this amazing poem.

- **Green pastures and quiet waters time**

Each and every one of us knows that in our lives there are good times when everything is just fine! There is no chaos, no troubles, and no problems to solve. Life is just good. Can you picture this time in your life? Actually, this is the stage when it is most difficult to stay in touch with God. During this stage we can fall into a fantasy that we are in charge and we do not need God. But, the Shepherd is still with us; still watching over us; still leading us gently and quietly. This Psalm gives you a reminder of the Good Shepherd’s presence and an invitation to make the relationship connection with the Shepherd even, and especially, in the good times.

- **Paths of righteousness time**

There is a time in each of our lives that we are called to work. God gives each of us talents, skills, and gifts to enable us to make our world a better place. It does not matter what your job might be, the Shepherd challenges you to have an attitude, a habit, and a life practice with your job that does the right thing. Righteousness is simply doing the right thing! In your work, in your home life, in all your life, do the right thing!

When economic times are rough, doing the right thing is challenging. The temptation is to cut a corner, or slip over the sloppy line.

When economic times are easy, doing the right thing is challenging. The temptation is to sneak something by an unsuspecting customer.

No matter what is happening economically, politically, or socially the Good Shepherd is with us leading us in the right paths to do the right thing in God’s right time! Daily life with the Good Shepherd is celebrating right living!

- **Valley of the Shadow of Death time**

Do you know that none of us is going to get out of this life alive? We are all going to die. We are all going to walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

We are all going to experience grief. If you love, you will know the great hurt of losing a loved one. If you trust, you will know the great pain of being betrayed.

Your walk in the valley of the shadow of death is inevitable. You will walk in that dark valley where the wolves howl, the cold winds blow, and it is so dark that you cannot see your hand in front of your face. Even and especially in this dark valley, you know that the Good Shepherd is with you. Jesus walked this path before you. Jesus knows every turn in the road. The Good Shepherd walked this way before you so that you can trust his guidance as you walk blinded by the pain of death and grief. The Good Shepherd will have his staff to guide you and his rod to protect you. You are in Jesus’ hands and there is no place and no one better in the midst of the dark valley of the shadow of death.

You can walk with confidence; you can walk with hope; you can even walk with a song in your heart because the Risen Christ is with you! You are not alone. And, Christ knows the way home.

- **Banquet Time**

Fortunately, for our sakes, Jesus did walk that lonesome valley all by himself. Because Christ lives, we know that the valley is not the end. There is a home beyond the valley. God promises to throw a party for every one of God’s children who walk through the valley. No enemy can separate us from God’s banquet feast. God will welcome us home for an eternity of celebration with our family and our friends.

### **Life with the Risen Christ, the Good Shepherd, is Celebration!**

Psalm 23 ends with the affirmation that life is good. All life is good. Even life in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death is good, because the Good Shepherd is with us in and through it all. And when we are in close relationship with the Good Shepherd then we know who we are and we can walk with confidence and power! Friends we are Easter people. We know that God is good. We know who we are and whose we are! Because of Psalm 23:

## I KNOW WHO I AM

- > I am God's child (John 1:12)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+1:12](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+1:12))
- > I am Christ's friend (John 15:15 )  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:15))
- > I am united with the Lord(1 Cor. 6:17 )  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+6:17](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+6:17))
- > I am bought with a price(1 Cor. 6:19-20)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+6:1-20](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+6:1-20))
- > I am a saint set apart for God. (Eph. 1:1)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+1:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+1:1))
- > I am a personal witness of Christ. (Acts 1:8)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=acts+1:8](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=acts+1:8))
- > I am the salt & light of the earth ( Matt.5:13-14)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+5:13-14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+5:13-14))
- > I am a member of the Body of Christ(1 Cor. 12:27)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+12:27](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+12:27))
- > I am free forever from condemnation ( Rom. 8: 1-2)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:1-2](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:1-2))
- > I am a citizen of Heaven. I am significant ( Phil.3:20)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+3:20](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+3:20))
- > I am free from any charge against me (Rom. 8:31 -34)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:31-34](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:31-34))
- > I am a minister of reconciliation for God(2 Cor.5:17-21)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+5:17-21](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+5:17-21))
- > I have access to God through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:18))
- > I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:6](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:6))
- > I cannot be separated from the love of God( Rom.8:35-39)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:35-39](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:35-39))
- > I am established, anointed, sealed by God (2 Cor.1:21-22)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+1:21-22](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+1:21-22))
- > I am assured all things work together for good (Rom. 8: 28)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:28](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+8:28))
- > I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit (John 15:16 )  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:16))
- > I may approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph. 3: 12 )  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+3:12](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+3:12))
- > I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippinas+4:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippinas+4:13))
- > I am the branch of the true vine, a channel of His life (John 15: 1-5)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:1-5](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:1-5))
- > I am God's temple (1 Cor. 3: 16 ) . ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthinas+3:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthinas+3:16))  
I am complete in Christ (Col. 2: 10)([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+2:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+2:10))
- > I am hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3) . ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+3:3](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+3:3))  
I have been justified (Romans 5:1) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+5:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+5:1))
- > I am God's co-worker (1 Cor.. 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1). ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthinas+3:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthinas+3:9))  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthinas+6:1](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthinas+6:1))
- I am God's workmanship. (Eph. 2:10 ) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+2:10))
- > I am confident that the good works God has begun in me will be perfected. (Phil 1: 5)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippinas+1:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippinas+1:5))
- > I have been redeemed and forgiven.(Col.1:14).  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+1:14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=colossians+1:14))
- I am adopted as God's child (Eph 1:5)  
([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+1:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+1:5))
- > I belong to God,
- > Do you know
- > who you are!?

The Risen Christ provides for us a better and better vision of life now and life eternal. Jesus invites you to celebrate life now and for all eternity. Friends, the best really is yet to come!

