

## Hymns of the Faith: “The Lord's My Shepherd”

Psalm 23

By [Dr. Bill Wymond](#)

*A Presentation of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi  
with  
Dr. Ligon Duncan, Dr. Derek Thomas, and Dr. Bill Wymond*

**Dr. Wymond:** Good morning! This is “Hymns of the Faith,” brought to you by Jackson's First Presbyterian Church. The minister of the First Presbyterian Church is Dr. Ligon Duncan. Stay tuned for “Hymns of the Faith.”... Here with “Hymns of the Faith” is Dr. Ligon Duncan.

**Dr. Duncan:** Thank you, Bill Wymond. This is Ligon Duncan. I'm here today with Derek Thomas and yourself for “Hymns of the Faith.”

*Hymns of the Faith* today is going to be about a Psalm, but it's about a Psalm that so many of you have sung for such a long time you might not have realized that you were singing a Scottish metrical Psalm. This Psalm that we're going to be studying today comes out of *The Scottish Psalter of 1650*, so it's been sung by Presbyterians and others for over 350 years. There are lots of settings of this particular Psalm because it's one of the most famous of all the Psalms in our English Bibles, as well as one of the most famous arrangements of a Scottish Metrical Psalm. I would guess in our tradition, Bill Wymond, that this Psalm, along with *All People That On Earth Do Dwell*, which is a rendering in the *Scottish Metrical Psalter* of Psalm 100, are probably the two best known Psalms that we still sing; and of course I'm referring to the Twenty-third Psalm in the *Scottish Metrical Psalter*, which in our version is entitled *The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want*.

Now there will be many people in our listening audience who will immediately have a tune in their mind. The most popular tune, I think, probably in Scotland and in America today that this Psalm is sung to is CRIMOND, and we of course have CRIMOND in our hymnal along with a couple of other hymns. But why don't we play CRIMOND, Bill, and then we'll talk about the various tunes. [Dr. Wymond plays.]

It strikes me, listening to that tune, Bill (because I've still got *This Is My Father's World* on my mind)...we had just thought about that hymn not long ago. This tune

dates from the late nineteenth century, and it's sort of sweet and pretty, kind of like *This Is My Father's World*. Now, the bass line has a little oomph to it. You know I'm sort of used to rumbling along with the bass line which has a little more of a...I don't know...martial is not quite the term for it. But the tune itself is kind of sweet and pretty. Tell us a little about CRIMOND.

**Dr. Wymond:** Well, this tune CRIMOND was written by a lady named Jessie Seymore Irvine, and she was the daughter of a minister who served several small parishes up in northeast Scotland. One of those little parishes was called Crimond (and it's a town that today has about a population of 800 or something like that), so the tune got its name from that parish. But she was in an organ class evidently, studying organ as a teenager, and wrote out an exercise for the class. Somehow this tune was taken and set by a man named David Grant to this particular set of words. So it doesn't have a real auspicious beginning, but nevertheless that's how it started.

**Dr. Duncan:** And it's not the only tune that we have in our hymnal. In fact, we sing — or certainly have sung — one or two other tunes to this. And Derek, we were talking off air ahead of time, there are certainly a couple of different tunes that this would have been sung to in Ireland when you were pastoring there. This tune CRIMOND is well known in sort of a general Scottish culture. If you were in a school, or if you were in some national event where a hymn was being sung, this tune would probably be the tune that it was sung to, but it wasn't in the churches when I was there.

**Dr. Thomas:** No. And even in some of the great funerals of late — Lady Diana, for example, CRIMOND was the tune set to the Twenty-third Psalm. There was one more recently which I can't remember now, but again I think it was at the Westminster Cathedral, and it was CRIMOND.

You know, in Northern Ireland, which of course has all of its Scottish roots, at the graveside when traditionally only the men gathered after the service at the church...the men would gather at the graveside, and it was customary for a word to be given by the minister, and then it was also custom to sing the Twenty-third Psalm. I've seen grown men who I doubt were believers moved to tears at the very opening notes of CRIMOND. It is associated with something now that's sad and...

**Dr. Duncan:** Well, the Twenty-third Psalm is so often used. It's in the old *Scottish Book of Order*; it's certainly in *The Reformed Book of Order*. You've been revising a new version of *The Reformed Book of Order*, and presumably it will still be part of the readings for funeral services. So the Twenty-third Psalm is regularly used in sort of funerary sort of occasions.

**Dr. Thomas:** We sang the Twenty-third Psalm to MARTYRDOM, or...

**Dr. Duncan:** And to the MARTYRDOM, it goes [hums tune]...or to another one. [Dr. Wymond plays tune]...*Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?*

**Dr. Thomas:** And of course we sang them a lot slower than Americans sing anything, so there was a lot more...I don't know how to put it. You could say it was heavier, especially with the Twenty-third Psalm and the Hundredth Psalm. You could not get the congregation to sing that quickly. There was a...

**Dr. Duncan:** But when you hear a crowd at the military tattoo, eleven o'clock at night and the sun's beginning to go down in Scotland in August, and they're singing this slowly, it can take on a haunting kind of sound to it, and the little — almost trill...the sort of Scottish thing...and when you hear a crowd do that, it can have a haunting kind of sound to it as well. So I hear what you're saying about MARTYRDOM. What else did you sing it to, Derek?

**Dr. Thomas:** ROCKINGHAM OLD...or WILTSHIRE.

**Dr. Wymond:** Let me just do a little bit of that one. [Dr. Wymond plays.] I like that tune.

**Dr. Wymond:** I like that tune also, but I'll show you the tune that I like best for this, since we're talking about tunes. [Plays.]

**Dr. Duncan:** BROTHER JAMES' AIR? [Dr. Wymond continues playing...] I like this part coming up. I like that kind of...it kind of puts the emphasis right there on the final line.

**Dr. Wymond:** I think that has a charm about it. It's a very folksong-y tune.

**Dr. Duncan:** Where did that tune come from, Bill?

**Dr. Wymond:** It's actually just from the nineteenth century.

**Dr. Duncan:** It is? And we've got that in our hymnal. We've got BROTHER JAMES' AIR, and what else do we have?

**Dr. Wymond:** We have CRIMOND, which we've already talked about; and then we have another one called EVAN, which I'll just start... [plays]...sort of like that. That's familiar I'm sure, to some. So there are a lot of tunes out there.

**Dr. Duncan:** The author of this particular version of Psalm 23, the metrical version...it comes out of a Psalter put together by a number of folks. William Mure is often mentioned as is...do you say...Francis Rous?

**Dr. Thomas:** Well, yes. Of course this is a fascinating piece of British politics... English/Scottish politics, anyway, in the 1640's. Now help me here. Of course

you've got the use of the Psalms by Calvin in Geneva, and Basel. And then you've got the *Hopkins and Sternhold Psalter* which comes round about Calvin's death, so 1564...and that lasts for about a century. And then at the time of the Westminster Assembly in the 1640's, you've got the Ordinance of Parliament to actually produce a Psalter which is Francis Rous's work.

But the Scottish did not trust it, and hence William Mure, who's the Scotsman figure here, William Mure is part of that 1650 Scottish Psalter. But my understanding is that they did not alter the text of the Twenty-third Psalm. Now, I may be wrong about that. I thought...of course in the original Twenty-third Psalm, in the third verse:

“Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,

Yet will I fear *none* ill....”

And that's still in our *Trinity Hymnal*. These days it's *no* ill. I wish they wouldn't mess with the Twenty-third Psalm! There are some things that just have to stand, even though the English is gone. I just hate that modernization.

**Dr. Duncan:** John Piper's with you on that! Don't monkey around with the lyrics! [Laughs...]

**Dr. Thomas:** Well, I think it's part of a received tradition in worship, and I think it's important that we have certain texts in our head. And if people don't understand them, then I think we should explain what it means.

**Dr. Duncan:** By the way, I was just reading a quote this morning from a mutual friend of ours, Chip Stam, who teaches at Southern Seminary, and he was reminding us in his worship quote of the week — and by the way, if you have never seen Chip's material, you can actually just go online and run a Google® search on “worship quote of the week” and you'd eventually get to his website where he's got some of these tidbits — but he's reminding us of a G.K. Chesterton quote about how one of the things that needs to happen in our worship is that we need to allow our ancestors to speak to us, who are the most under-represented minority that we could possibly imagine. And there's a lot of wisdom to that, even textually letting our ancestors speak. It's another reason why I think it's important to sing some old tunes as well, and by “old” I don't just mean early 1900's or late 1800's. I mean really old tunes. Because I agree with what Peggy Noonan says, that you have really lost something when you have lost the sound of your ancestors' souls singing. And when you simply take the old texts and you put them to new tunes, you actually lose contact with the expressive experience of your forebears in the way they would have sung what they were singing. And I do think that music helps you get close to that.

So these folks put together a Psalter. Now why did they put together a Psalter?

Why are they all excited about singing Psalms?

**Dr. Thomas:** Because since the time of David, that is what the church used to sing!

**Dr. Duncan:** So what you're saying is that we've been doing this for 3,000 years; don't mess with it! [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Wymond:** But it is interesting in how the early church fathers...and I'm thinking of the ones in the 200-300 era...had so many discussions about what should be the song of the church. And they were worried about texts that were coming out of various branches of the church, and so most of them, to be safe, were just saying we really do think the main body of the congregational singing should be the Psalms.

**Dr. Duncan:** And really in all Christian traditions, all orthodox Christian traditions since that time, the Psalms have formed an important part of the sung praise. Now that's not to say that that's the only thing that those Christians sang, but it was a very important part of the diet of what the church was singing. And you can see the significance of that rationale. For one thing... you're a great student of John Calvin. Calvin thought that the Psalms provided an anatomy of all parts of the soul. Tell us a little bit about that, Derek.

**Dr. Thomas:** Well, was it in this program just a few weeks ago? You cited Carl Truman's statement: "What shall miserable Christians sing?" And there are times in my experience when I am not h-a-p-p-y, and I don't want to put my arms in the air and say "I'm h-a-p-p-y"...

**Dr. Wymond:** All the day long! [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Thomas:** ...And I think that part of the problem that certain kinds of popular hymnody have created, and particularly the...you can almost identify the "gospel genre" of the late nineteenth century, and I like those tunes more, I think, than you do. We've had this discussion before, and there's an aspect of them that certainly appeals to me. But there's an aspect of them that is false, if they're meant to be reflective of my entire Christian life, because there are times when that's not how I feel.

And I think that the Bible in the book of Psalms presents for us a redress that speaks to us pastorally, that speaks to us emotionally, that doesn't browbeat us into .... A famous incident I remember as a ... I was on vacation attending a church where I was browbeaten because I wasn't entering into the *joie de vivre* of the song leader, who was exhorting us to do certain hand motions, and I was refusing to do them.

**Dr. Duncan:** And you and your son refused to do them together.

**Dr. Thomas:** And eventually walked out [*laughter*] in just disgust that I was being browbeaten into something that I felt I had liberty not to do! Besides which I just thought that pastorally it was utterly insensitive, what he was doing. You know, Psalm 88 is not my favorite Psalm — that ends with “darkness is my only friend.” But I’m glad it’s there. If ever I feel like that — and I don’t think I’ve ever felt that...I may have come close to it on occasions, but I don’t think I’ve ever been there. But I’m glad it’s there. It’s like a parachute. And it’s there in my songbook, it’s there in the Bible songbook that one of the authors of the 150 Psalms was in a very, very, very dark place.

**Dr. Duncan:** The Psalms certainly have a maturing effect on the content of a lot of the lyrics that Christians — evangelical Christians — end up singing. I think our friends Keith and Kristen Geddy have a project in hand where they’re trying to set the whole Psalter to some kind of singable format in the sort of modern hymn tunes that they’re writing, along with Stuart Townend and others.

But this Psalm is a good Psalm to commit to memory. This isn’t the only good rendering; I like Isaac Watts’ rendering that you have the choir sing from time to time. There’s a wonderful Mac Wilberg arrangement of it that you sing that’s set to an early American folksong that I like a whole lot.

But this is a good sturdy... you know, I have to say, as much as I love *The Scottish Psalter*, not all of *The Scottish Psalter* is state of the art in terms of excellence in terms of lyrical content, but this is a good rendering of Psalm 23.

**Dr. Thomas:** We are speaking of the original *Scottish Psalter*. There’s actually a very fine new one...

**Dr. Duncan:** ...new one called *Sing Psalms*, which does a good job of updating and modernizing. Derek and I both are familiar with *The Irish Psalter* and *The Scottish Psalter*, which retains the “thee’s and the thou’s” and an older form of English, and there are many, many verses that are very precious to us out of that. But it can be hard for young folks who have had no experience of King James Bible English, or Geneva Bible English, and so there is a good new version called *Sing Psalms* which was produced by the Free Church. But this is a pretty good text, don’t you think, Bill?

**Dr. Wymond:** I think so. And I was just wondering... Derek, you would have more knowledge than I.... Who today sings the Psalms? Where are they sung?

**Dr. Thomas:** Well, in Jewish synagogues, for sure. But they’re sung in Presbyterian churches. They’re exclusively sung of course by our friends in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

**Dr. Duncan:** The Covenanter traditions, whether they’re in Ireland, or Scotland

or America, or Australia or elsewhere.

**Dr. Thomas:** They're sung in the Free Church of Scotland, the Church of Scotland, the National Church of Scotland....

**Dr. Duncan:** ...Would still have a Psalter bound into their hymnals and would sing them...

**Dr. Thomas:** But Anglicans, at least traditional Anglican liturgy has the singing of Psalms, and certainly the old...what is the old...?

**Dr. Wymond:** The Reformed Church, also, in the North and Eastern...

**Dr. Thomas:** I'm trying to get the name of the old Anglican hymnbook. Can you tell us a special name?

**Dr. Wymond:** Not *Hymns Ancient and Modern*?

**Dr. Thomas:** *Ancient and Modern*, yes! There was a Psalter section in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. And of course many of our hymns, to be fair, are Psalms. They're paraphrases of the Psalms, but then metrification....

**Dr. Duncan:** Well, you were referring to late nineteenth century hymnody which you like, and we sang one not long ago at First Pres when we sang *Under the Care of My God, the Almighty*, which is a Psalm 91 rendering. But most people probably wouldn't know that. They would just recognize it as a gospel hymn or a Bible song.

The Orthodox Church sings Psalms. Maybe not exclusively, but close to it, maybe. The Roman Catholic mass would have a lot of Psalmody in it.

**Dr. Thomas:** And a lot of our finest music has emerged out of the Psalms. I have always loved this Psalm, and I like this particular rendition of the Psalm, and I don't want the "thee's and thou's" of this to be taken out of it! I know it and I can sing it from memory. I don't have to have a copy of it with me. I think it's something I could sing anywhere — in a hospital, at a graveside, and at least there was a time certainly in Northern Ireland and Scotland when you pitch this and everyone knows the words and they'll sing it with you. There needs to be a good repertoire.

You know there are manuals, liturgy manuals — *Reformed Book of Common Order*, for example, that in the back of which there are half a dozen hymn-psalms that can be sung in extreme circumstances of need, and certainly this would be one of them.

**Dr. Duncan:** When is that book due out?

**Dr. Thomas:** Shortly. The editor is somewhat...

**Dr. Duncan:** [*Chuckles*]...somewhat indisposed at this point?

**Dr. Thomas:** I'm trying to think. Was it sung on the Titanic? I have a notion that it was sung on the Titanic. It wouldn't surprise me. It was sung at Queen Elizabeth's wedding in 1947. It was sung at her Silver Anniversary.

**Dr. Duncan:** Now that would have been significant, because the Queen was the daughter of a man who was never expected to be king, but because of the abdication of Edward VII, George came to the throne, and George was married to a Scottish noblewoman, Elizabeth Bowes Lyon, from the John Knox line actually, on the female side. So that would have been a very appropriate thing at her wedding, to have a Psalm sung.

**Dr. Thomas:** I can never ever now sing the fifth stanza, "Goodness and mercy..." without thinking of a dear, dear friend, Douglas MacMillan, ex-shepherd and rough hewn, and a...

**Dr. Duncan:** ...a manly figure...

**Dr. Thomas:** I remember him in Belfast, and he had this habit in later life of going very close up to the microphone and speaking in a low sort of voice, but the voice echoing throughout the room in a very dramatic way. And he told the story of two Border Collie sheepdogs called Goodness and Mercy, and because Ligon and I are both dog lovers, I remember it to this day. And every time I think of goodness and mercy now, I think of these two obedient, loving, Border Collie sheepdogs just at your heels wherever you're going.

**Dr. Duncan:** ...herding you along. We should pause then, Bill, and listen to this great Psalm.

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green;  
He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again;  
And me to walk doth make  
Within the paths of righteousness,  
E'en for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
Yet will I fear none ill,  
For thou art with me; and Thy rod



And staff me comfort still.

My table Thou hast furnished  
In presence of my foes;  
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,  
And my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life  
Shall surely follow me:  
And in God's house forevermore  
My dwelling place shall be.

**Dr. Wymond:** This has been “Hymns of the Faith,” brought to you by Jackson's First Presbyterian Church. Our soloist this morning was Ben Roberson.

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