

The Lord of 2025

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Date: 28 December 2025

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 00] Okay, good morning, everybody. Great to have you. And if you are new, my name is Kevin. Great to be with you this morning.

This Sunday between Christmas and New Year, our Thanksgiving Sunday, one of my favorite Sundays of the year. I always love this Sunday where the sermon will be a bit shorter. We try and take a bit more time to hear from various people the stories of God at work in our lives and in our church as we reflect on the ways that God has led us and grown us and revealed himself to us in this last year.

I kept on wanting to jump up after everybody shared and just add a little bit more to the story that I know. One thing I was going to say, Bernard, just to pick on you, something Bernard said earlier this year, which I thought was really astounding.

He said, I want to learn how do I steward the suffering well. I thought that was an amazing, amazing thought. When suffering will come our way and we can either feel sorry for ourselves, we can either play the victim, or we can say, God, this is something that you have brought to me.

[1 : 04] How do I steward this season? How do I steward the suffering well? I thought that was, and Margo, as you've transitioned from working for 45 years in the same firm, somewhere around there, 40 years in one firm, and as you moved into retirement, I remember earlier this year, you prayed saying, God, help me to use this season well.

And wow, has he answered that prayer as you responded to him. That was so encouraging. And I know just all the stories. I wanted to just comment on it. But, you know, one of the things at Watermark, when people ask me, tell me about your church, tell me about Watermark Church, I always start off saying, well, firstly, it's the very best church in the whole world.

And that is true. That is true. I really do feel like that. And one of the reasons why I say that, the thing that I love about our church is the countless stories of God at work in people's lives.

In various ways, some spectacular ways, some very ordinary ways, the stories of God at work in our lives and in our church. You know, as a church, our goal is never to be the biggest church, or the fanciest church, or the most popular church.

That's never been our aim. Our aim is we want to be an authentic church. We want to be a real church. We want to be a healthy church where real people are meeting with the real God in their everyday areas of life and meeting God's real grace.

[2 : 24] And so that's our goal. That's our hope for us as a church. And so this morning, I feel like I've got 10 more reasons to boast in our church. Thank you for sharing those stories of God being at work in our church.

Now, as we come to the close of 2025, I thought it would take just a few minutes. I'm going to speak for maybe 20 minutes, a bit shorter than usual. And look at, just reflect on 2025 through one of the most famous passages or chapters in the entire Bible.

And so I'm going to ask Esther to come on up and read Psalm 23 to us. If you've got a Bible, you can open up to Psalm 23. Esther's going to read it for us. And then we're going to reflect on this year by looking at this passage briefly.

So Esther, will you come and read God's word to us? Just by the way, if you don't know Esther, Esther is Simon and Sherman's daughter, who was a watermarker for many, many years, then moved to London, studied, got married to Gerald.

They now live in London. Esther, it's great having you and Gerald back with us. Wonderful to have you with us. So will you read God's word to us, please, this morning? Today's scripture reading is taken from Psalm 23, verses 1 to 6.

[3 : 33] Feel free to get some Bibles at the front or the back if you don't have one. It is on page 4 to 8 of the Church Bibles. Starting from verse 1.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This is the word of God. Thank you.

[4 : 40] Okay, thanks. Let me pray for us, and then let's look at this together. Father God, we do ask that you speak to us from your word. Your word, Lord, infallible, inspired by you. My words are certainly not.

But God, as we think and reflect and meditate on these words, won't you both encourage us and draw us to yourself as we reflect on this past year and prepare for the year ahead.

Draw us to yourself. Help us to trust you. And speak to us, we pray, in your great and wonderful name. Amen. So, friends, I wonder how has 2025 been for you?

For me, it's been a good year. Moving into this venue was obviously a wonderful, wonderful thing. And so it's been a good year in some ways. In other ways, 2025 has been one of the hardest, one of the most stretching years that I think I've probably ever had.

But how has it been for you? For some of us, maybe 2025 has been a fantastic year. Maybe you got married this year. Maybe you got that dream job that you really wanted.

[5 : 44] Maybe you had a life-changing experience. Discovered something new about God. Met some friends. Built some relationships. Met people that you never thought you would meet. For some of us, 2025 has been a profoundly challenging year.

A number of people in our church have been diagnosed with cancer. Some young children. Others have close relationships have come into strain. Some of us have lost work.

Some of us have had other medical challenges. For some people in our church have had to bury their loved ones and say goodbye. Others have had to deal with deep trauma from the past that has surfaced.

And a host of other challenges. For most of us, if not all of us, 2025 has been something of a mix of both of these. A year of great joy mixed with times of sorrow.

At times of laughter and mixed with times of tears. Times of delight. And times of longing. Longing for more. Times of quiet confidence and trust.

[6 : 45] Times of unanswered prayers. Unanswered questions. And uncertainty. And in many ways, if we think about it, this is the journey of life, isn't it?

Life has many ups and downs. Good days and bad days. I think someone was sharing earlier. This is the journey of life. But it's also the journey of faith. For those of us that are followers of Jesus, from now until the day that we pass away, the life that we live will be one of faith.

Learning to trust in the God who calls us to himself. And Psalm 23 reminds us that we need not undertake this journey of life alone.

In fact, for those of us that are followers of Jesus, Psalm 23 tells us we do not undertake this journey alone. Because the Psalm is both a reminder and encouragement to approach this journey of life, this journey of faith, from a different perspective.

Psalm 23 is inviting us to see who it is that sustains us, carries us, guides us, and ultimately welcomes us home. And so Psalm 23 is a celebration of the God who does all these things.

[7 : 55] And so if you've got your Bible, look at it with me. I think we've got it on the screen here. Maybe you don't need a Bible today. The whole Psalm on one screen. And look at how the Psalm starts off.

David says this, The Lord is my shepherd. Probably some of the most famous verses in the entire Bible. Anybody here got that tattooed on their arm somewhere? Wouldn't put it past somebody here.

Okay. The Lord is my shepherd. Some of the most famous verses in all the Bible. Now, David Gibson, who wrote an outstanding book, probably my favorite book in the whole world, called The Lord of Psalm 23, starts off saying, These words are more astounding than we realize.

Why is that? Well, in the English Bible, when the word Lord is written in capital letters, like it is here, it's a translation of the Hebrew word Yahweh.

And Yahweh is the personal name that God gave to himself when he revealed himself to Moses. You may remember the story in Exodus 3. Moses is out in the wilderness, and God reveals himself to Moses.

[8 : 58] And he says to Moses, I want you to go back to Egypt and to set my people free, to deliver them. Tell the people that the God of creation has heard their cries, heard their agony.

He is going to be their deliverer and set them free. And there's a bit of back and forth. Moses is not so sure. But eventually Moses says, Well, who are you, God? What is your name? Who should I say is setting his people free?

And God gives his name. He says, My name is I am that I am. Which in Hebrew is shortened to Yahweh. I am that I am.

It's a very strange name. It's a very unusual name. But that's the name that God gives himself. It's God's way of saying, I am not defined by anyone or anything.

You know, as human beings, we find our identity by all sorts of things, but primarily by our family of origin, our parents that we came from. I, for better or worse, am a Murphy.

[10 : 01] Not much I can do about that. As much as I try and pretend that I'm a Hong Konger, I am a South African. Again, who I am cannot be changed.

It's why when we grow up in difficult families, so much of our identity is, we have identity issues. Because we get our identity from our parents. I am the son of Steve and Jenny.

So much of my identity in who I am is shaped and formed by those around me. But the God of the Bible, his identity is not in relation to anyone or anything.

He is not the God of the Israelites, or the God of Christianity, or the God of ancient Israel, or the God of these people. He is the Lord, the uncontained one, the unconstrained one.

He is not defined by anyone or anything. He does not come from anyone or anything. He is not sustained, governed, contained by anything. He is not defined by his relationship to anyone.

[11 : 03] He is eternal. He is uncreated. He's existed from eternity past. He will exist forever. He is the creator and the sustainer of everyone and everything.

He is utterly mysterious and uncontrollable. He is the only being in all of existence who simply is. He is, I am who I am.

Or in Hebrew, Yahweh. Or in English, the Lord. You will no doubt know that in Jewish culture, many people dare not take the name of Yahweh on their lips.

And when I was at school, I had a French teacher who was Jewish, and I said, how do you write Yahweh? What is the Hebrew character? She would not write it. She refused to write it. Because to take God's name in vain was such a serious crime.

In the Old Testament, you would be stoned at the city gates. Stoned to death. Nobody takes God's name, Yahweh, in vain. But here, David says something that is so almost blasphemous.

[12 : 06] He says, This God, this uncreated, awesome, the one that is, this Lord is my shepherd. The Lord, the Lord, the one who simply is, is my shepherd.

And David Gibson says, Of all the beautiful words in this psalm, what the psalmist is claiming here is the most staggering of them all. And yet, this is what the whole of Psalm 23 is about, isn't it?

That for those of us who have come to know and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, this being, this entity, this God, is the one who promises to walk with us, to sustain us, to carry us.

Friends, in the ups and downs of 2025, in the cancer diagnoses, in the lost jobs, in the marriage, meeting someone new, in all the ups and downs, this is who's been with us, who's carried us home. But what does that actually mean? Well, the rest of Psalm 23 tells us. And so here are just a few thoughts. He says here, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

[13 : 10] Now, David's obviously not suggesting that this God is going to use his sovereign power to be Santa Claus and give us everything that we want, right? That's not what he means. In modern English, to want something and to need something are two very different things.

But in Old English, to be in want of something is another way of saying, I need something. David here is writing, he says, The Lord is my shepherd. He takes care of all my needs. There is nothing that I need that he doesn't know about and he refuses to provide or take care of.

Or as the Jewish rabbi said, If the Lord is my shepherd, if Yahweh is my shepherd, what else, what other need do I have? He is all I need. He will take care of my deepest needs.

Friends, isn't it true that for most of us, our very best moments of 2025 have been those when irrespective of our circumstances, we've had this deep and abiding sense that the Lord is with us. What else do we need? When you're in the doctor's room, when you're in your boss's office, when your child is sick and you have a profound sense that God is with you, though you would love the circumstances to change, aren't those some of the best moments?

[14 : 23] And conversely, aren't some of our worst moments, our lowest moments, those when we've forgotten that the Lord is with us? And so David says here, The Lord is my shepherd.

He takes care of all my needs. He is the one who gives me rest. He is the one who leads me to stillness. He is the one who restores my soul. Friends, in a world which promises and pursues rest, quietness, ease and comfort, respite from the difficulties and the challenges of life, especially through modern technology, therapy, distraction, and stress management, David reminds us that what we need is not more AI technology, not escapist distractions, not better stress management tools.

What we need is time with the sovereign God, the Lord, the one who is, the one who fills our soul, who leads us to stillness of heart, who gives us deepest rest by bringing us to the place where we realize this Lord is my shepherd.

What else do I need? Friends, I wonder if it's worth reflecting at this time on the year that's gone past behind us. How much of 2025 has been fueled by self-effort?

How much of 2025 have we dug deep and just got ourselves through? How much have we willed ourselves through this year and pushed on? How much have we been driven by the demands of life rather than drawn by the voice of the shepherd who wants to sustain and lead and carry us?

[16 : 02] But notice, David here doesn't want us to be under any illusions that walking with Christ means that life is going to be easy. David does not tell us that follow Jesus, what can go wrong?

No, because notice the context. These great promises are not given in the context of life being easy. What does verse 4 tell us? This is when God cares for us when, verse 4, when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Friends, how can this be? How can this be that one and the same time we can have green pastures and still waters in the midst of the fog of disappointment and deep fear?

How can we find rest and stillness and restoration of our souls when sadness refuses to lift, when trapped in habitual sin, when rejected by one that we love, when overwhelmed with a deep sense of being a failure and a disappointment?

Verse 4 tells us, for you are with me. You are with us. That's how we can have the peace we long for. Friends, for some of us this year has felt like walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

[17 : 12] Whether cancer, death, retrenchment, work or family life, life is hard. And the valley of the shadow of death looms over all of us. And yet the promise of Psalm 23 is that even in the darkest moments, the deepest valley, the most debilitating sickness, the scariest doctor's report, the promise that we get to hold on is that the sovereign God, the one who simply is, is the one who sustains and carries us.

The one who is with us. The one who never leaves us. And God's being with us is not just some kind of vague, you know, ethereal promise that we get on to.

It's not some kind of psychological placebo effect. David knows that God being with him, he's experienced that through his rod and his staff. Look at verse 4. It says, What are the rod and the staff?

Every shepherd in the ancient world had these two sticks with them, a rod and a staff. A rod was about two feet long and had a big wooden circle in the end in which they would insert bits of iron and it was a mace-like object.

It was a weapon with which you protected the sheep. So when wolves or thieves or robbers or other enemies came in or nearby, you would threaten them, chase them off with your rod.

[18 : 38] It was a weapon of war, a weapon to protect the sheep. Modern shepherds in Israel walk around with guns and AK-47s in David's day, you had your rod. It was to protect the sheep from outside danger, danger that wanted to invade from the outside.

But every shepherd had not only a rod, but also a staff. We all know what a staff looks like. It has a stick and then a round thing at the top. Every Christmas pageant has one, right? A staff protected the sheep, not from the danger out there, but the danger within.

The staff would bring back the sheep when they were too close to the edge, when they were wondering, when they needed to be disciplined, when they were fighting. The staff would be used to separate them and to keep them the peace within the group.

Every shepherd had these two things, a rod and a staff, one to protect from the danger out there, the other to protect from the danger within. Friends, Jesus Christ, our great shepherd, leads and guides us with both of these, keeping us safe from the danger out there, but also challenging the danger that lies within the sin of our hearts, calling us back to himself.

And so friends, this next year, no doubt, many of us will at times feel like we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Friends, there will be times when life is going to be unbearably hard. There will be times when we will be tempted to let fear rule our hearts, but as Mark Devers says, our fears lie to us about how important they are.

[20 : 03] Friends, though fears and difficulties are real, what David celebrates in the psalm is that they are not sovereign. They are not Lord. They are not ultimate.

In those moments, David wants us to remember that neither our fears nor our circumstances nor our surroundings have the ultimate voice in our life. the sovereign Lord does. He is the one that will carry us home.

He will carry us through the valley of the shadow of death and out the other side. And so look at the final two verses of the psalm. David says that the Lord prepares a table, a place of feasting and fellowship in the midst of our enemies, a place of relational warmth and love in the midst of turmoil, a haven of hope and honesty in the midst of a world of hatred and deceit, a foretaste of heaven to come, that even in the darkest valleys, he will prepare a table where we will be at peace.

And ultimately, Christ will bring us home. Verse six says, surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Friends, every one of us are going to one day die.

Even the greatest miracle worker, the greatest health, wealth and prosperity teacher is still going to die. But friends, for those of us in Christ, death is not the end. Death is a doorway into life with Christ forever.

[21 : 24] He will bring us home and we will dwell with him forever. And so how should we respond? Well, let me just give us two brief thoughts as we go into for this day and 2026.

Firstly, how should we respond? Gratitude and thankfulness. Gratitude and thankfulness. Friends, in this last year, there have been 10,000 moments. I think I did the calculation earlier.

Something like 31 million seconds. Is that right? In a year. 31 million moments where the Lord has been shepherding, guiding, sustaining, carrying us. And we have not even known about it.

Friends, there have been times the Lord who governs the atoms and the solar systems, who created the cosmos, the galaxies, nebulae, and all other galaxies, keeps them in their place, is the one who's carried you, sustained you, upheld you in every second of 2025.

And most of the time, we've been completely oblivious to it. In the quiet hours of the morning when we are fast asleep, he is the one that's sustaining us with breath. Friends, every airplane that you've gotten, every car ride you've taken, every time you've crossed the road this year, the Lord has been there.

[22 : 39] Guiding, sustaining, protecting you. Every lightning strike, every super typhoon, the Lord has protected us through it all. Psalm 50 says, the one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me.

What does God want from us this morning? Maybe he doesn't want another song. Maybe he just wants a heart of thankfulness for his guiding and his sustaining, his care of us.

Maybe the most worshipful and God-honoring thing we can do this morning is to take time to remember and give thanks for his goodness to us. Friends, what can you give thanks to God for today? What is something in your life?

Where have you seen his goodness? Where have you taken his goodness for granted? David says in verse six, surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. Where has the Lord been good to you?

And how can you thank him? And then last thought for today, how can we respond? Surrender and trust. Surrender and trust. As we said, 2026 is around the corner.

[23 : 40] Thursday it starts. And in 2026, we are all going to face challenges. In fact, all of us are going to face two challenges in particular. The one challenge, hardship and difficulty is going to come our way.

No doubt about it, we are going to have difficult days this year. But the second challenge that all of us are going to face is the temptation to try and handle those difficulties and challenges on our own, in our own strength, to knuckle down and get ourselves through.

When life is hard and marked with difficulties, David wants to remind us, don't handle it on your own. And David, whose life was full of difficulties and challenges, remember David faced Goliath, that Philistine giant.

David was pursued and chased for 10 years by Saul who wanted to kill him and destroy him. David, whose own son staged a coup to drive him out of the kingdom and take the throne from him.

David, this David, reminds us that self-sufficiency, self-dependence will not lead to deep soul rest. Each, certainly not the rest that we crave.

[24 : 47] Self-sufficiency will leave us in the valley of the shadow of death all alone. For just yesterday, our family did one of my favorite things to do in Hong Kong.

went to Stanley Market. What a great place. I love Stanley Market. And as we're leaving, leaving the market, on the left-hand side we walked past a linen shop and in the window was a tote bag.

Now, one lesson, never believe anything people write on tote bags, right? It's the kitsch rubbish in the world. But anyway, on this tote bag that someone was selling said, the words were, above all else, believe in yourself.

Friends, don't believe the lie. Don't believe in yourself this next year. Friends, when this year, believe and surrender and trust in the one who walked through the ultimate valley of the shadow of death for you.

The one who walked in the garden of Gethsemane alone. The one who walked up the Mount Calvary alone. The one who ascended the hill and did die. The one who embraced death for you and I is that we ultimately don't have to face death but can pass through death to life.

[25 : 59] Friends, this year, trust and surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who will carry us through. Don't trust in yourself, trust in Him. Friends, the maximum of our age is in self we trust.

Christians know how utterly stupid that is. The Lord is our shepherd. We will trust in Him. And these great promises and assurances are only for those who have made the Lord their shepherd.

The Lord who have come to trust and surrender to Him. Friends, is that true of you? Have you come to know and trust in the Lord, the sovereign God? What would it look like for you to live by faith in this next year?

What is one area of your life in particular that you find it hard to let go? Friends, can I invite you now to bring it before Him? Can I invite you now to surrender to King Jesus?

Can I invite you now to let Christ, the Lord of all creation, the sovereign God who brought galaxies and universes and the cosmos into space, can I invite you to let Him be Lord of your life?

[27 : 03] And in particular, the area of your life you find hard to trust Him with. Let Him lead you off the path of self-sufficiency onto the path of His grace and love. I was thinking this morning of a Christmas carol we sometimes sing.

Let me close with this. It says, O little child of Bethlehem, O holy child of Bethlehem, descend on us we pray. Cast out our sin, come and enter in, be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels sing, great glad tidings tell, O come, abide in us, O Lord Emmanuel. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, that is our prayer.

Child of Bethlehem, great sovereign God of all, you who humbled yourself to be born in a stable, laid in a manger, who went to the cross to be laid in a tomb, who rose again.

God, cast out our sin, cast out our self-sufficiency and come and enter and be born in us today.

Come and make your home in us. Jesus, we pray, come to us, abide in us.

[28 : 05] O Lord, Emmanuel, God with us. In your great name we pray. Amen. Amen. Friends, let's take a few minutes just to reflect and to respond.

Maybe just to think about those questions. What is one area of your life that the Lord is calling you to trust Him with? Friends, maybe you're not even a Christian this morning.

Why don't you come to Christ and let Him be your shepherd, your king? Surrender to Him. Follow Him. Believe in Him. He will turn your life around. Holy Spirit, come.

Help us. Help us, Lord. We need you. Holy Spirit, help us to surrender and trust you, we pray. God, in the ups and downs and the mountain peaks and the valley lows, help us to walk with you.

Jesus, we would rather be in the valley with you than on the mountain alone. And so help us, we pray. In your great name. Amen. Amen. Amen.