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Psalm 23 sermon

Psalm 23 is one of the most popular passages in the bible in the world

-I was made to memorize it when I was about 6 years old. The time I learned how popular it was when I was in the fifth grade, and everybody in my school was singing “as i walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” I was so excited that my classmates were starting to get familiar with the bible. At first, I thought they started going to church. Upon further listening however they would say “as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I look at my life and realize there is nothing left” which did not reflect the actual Psalm 23. One way or another, Psalm 23 is one of the more familiar bible passages. This Psalm has been referenced in several popular songs, this Psalm has been recited in funerals, this Psalm was recited by the then president of the US George W Bush after the 9-11 attack.

I believe that Psalm 23 is one of the most popular passages in the world because either we are going through life’s uncertainties right now or at one point we will all eventually face life’s uncertainties.

Let’s look into one of the most popular Psalms in the world and see how the Word speak truth in our lives:

Let us read Psalm 23:

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,[a]

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 your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

The three things we can draw from this Psalms are the following:

- 1) We must acknowledge the Lord's shepherding
- 2) The Lord's shepherding guides us
- 3) And finally, the Lord's shepherding brings us into the FULLNESS of life

- 1) Let us acknowledge the Lord's shepherding

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The word "shepherd" is a common motif throughout Scripture. To say "I shall not want" is how the writer is saying the Lord is sufficient to provide our needs and our satisfaction; He alone is our satisfaction

Let me tell you what it does NOT say - when we say “I lack nothing”, it does not mean that this is a promise that all of our material desires and comforts will be given to us. Rather to say “I lack nothing” means that we find the Lord himself to be all-satisfying even though we as believers are not promised an easy life, but rather a life of suffering.

[pause]

“The Lord is my shepherd.”

The pronoun “my” is significant”. The Lord is a shepherd for the collective people, but the Lord is also a shepherd for a particular individual, that is YOU and I. Even as you and I are part of the sheepfold of God, even as you and I are just one person among the entire body of Christ, you and I are able to have a personal relationship with the Lord, and as Billy Graham stated once “Christ not only died for all, He died for EACH” Let the statement “the Lord is MY shepherd” marinate in your mind and heart right now, and let us absorb what it means for you to have a personal relationship with our Shepherd.

This is a popular Psalm, even amongst non-believers. However, let’s take a note here - if the Lord is a shepherd, he is a shepherd for the sheep, not the goat. See, the goat is independent and does not follow the shepherd as the sheep do. To really have this Psalm speak to the reader and not merely be sentimental, one must have a regenerate heart and one must be born again.

Too many times even as believers, we tend to follow God as a goat rather than a sheep. The characteristics of a goat are the following: independent, self-sufficient, and

stubborn. The characteristics of the sheep are the following: helplessness, dumb, and meek.

The message of the world that we are receiving is that we need to be assertive, independent, and self-sufficient. In my various work experience as a social worker, barista, and forklift driver, I have heard from several of my co-workers that to be successful and to make the next promotion, we need to be assertive and toot our own horn. I remember on my first day of work in a packaging facility, a fellow co-worker [it was also her first day] asked me why I am working so hard and why I am taking the abuse. I told her that it is our first day of work and that it is too early to make any complaints. My fellow new co-worker proceeded to not help me with the task and went on to tell everybody that she will stand up for herself and not take any mess from the company. I felt convicted that even though there are events that I will have to be assertive in my work, having the attitude of a servant-leader will make my workplace a more enjoyable place for everybody and by doing so, the testimony of God's work in my life will be recognized. Long story short, my fellow assertive coworker got fired after she gave her strong opinion to some of the senior employees at the jobsite and I eventually gained a reputation for being gracious and I was recognized by my superiors that people worked harder when I was on the team. I am sharing this particular story because while taking the characteristic of the sheep may look like foolishness to the world that tells us to take the characteristic of the goat, being humble and gentle may go a long way and strengthen our witness of the work of Christ.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me besides quiet waters, He restores my soul”

If the Lord is my shepherd, he will shepherd us to a place of rest. He makes us lie down in green pastures – where there is sustenance and life. What may be the green pastures, except that it be the Scriptures, the Word of truth that gives us strength, always fresh, always rich, never exhausted?

He leads us to the quiet waters, which is antithetical to the storms and waves of the sea. In biblical literature, the waves and the sea represent chaos

- the quiet waters therefore represent peace

- the Lord leads us to the still waters

The Lord's shepherding is about restoring souls as we lie down in green pastures and quiet waters. For the believer, souls must be restored whether in erring in sin or in dryness of the soul. As Charles Spurgeon stated, “when the soul grows sorrowful, he revives it...when it is sinful he sanctifies it, when it is weak, he strengthens it”. There may be many coping strategies of the person as it pertains to mental and emotional health, but the SOUL of the person must be restored. There may be sentimental readings of the Psalms to make your heart feel better, but it is imperative that we walk by the Spirit and not in the flesh.

The Christian journey is about learning to submit to the Lord's shepherding, trusting that God knows us better than we know ourselves

2) The Lord's shepherding guides us

“He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake”

Whatever paths we find ourselves on, David speaks of how the Lord leads us through the paths of righteousness.

What is the path of righteousness, however?

The worldly way of the path of righteousness is for self-fulfillment and self-glorification while the Psalmist tells us that when the Lord is our shepherd, we are to be guided in the path of righteousness for HIS name sake. To clarify what the righteousness of the Lord is, let me read from Matthew 20:25-28:

25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

At times we may not understand the path of righteousness because it appears that when we try to walk in righteousness things are difficult. Trying to serve others in the Kingdom way can be difficult and draining. No work for the Kingdom is too big or too small. Jesus stated in Matthew 10:42: and if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me”

-the Lord's shepherding for the saints is through this fallen world.

-there will be suffering in the here and the now

-but notice that we walk through the valley of the SHADOW of death, not the valley of death!

-a shadow cannot harm us. The shadow of a truck cannot run over us. The shadow of a wild animal cannot harm us. The shadow of death cannot kill us. Even death, oh death where is your sting? We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality.” There is an account in the book of Matthews that when Jesus brought a little girl to life, he said “go away, for she is not dead, she is asleep.” If the Lord is our shepherd, death in its substance is removed , and only a shadow remains.

Can I tell you the bright side of walking in the difficult path of righteousness? Though walking in the path of righteousness takes us to the valley, we do not get stuck the valley, but we are walking THROUGH the valley. [ch] We do not walk in darkness, but we walk THROUGH the darkness.

As the Lord is guiding of in paths of righteousness even through the valleys and the darkness- the Lord leads us through our sanctification [ch]

Is your sense of security and safety dictated by your circumstances or by knowing the Lord?

-do we TRUST if we find ourselves as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death?

On Genesis 11, there were a group of people that banded together to build a tower to make a name for themselves. However the Lord saw what they were doing and proceeded to confuse their languages - thus the name "tower of Babel".

There may be times when you become so ambitious, and then you come to an impasse where you are confused and you wonder why things are not working out. Note that at the end of the passage, it stated "at this time people began to call on the name of the Lord."

"Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"

The rod and the staff is used by the shepherd as a gentle redirection of sheep. Sometimes it may be used as a way of chastening. Any way we look at the rod and staff, we need the Savior's shepherding and leading. The rod and the staff is our comfort, and oh how quick are we to forget and find comfort outside of the Lord

3) The Lord's shepherding brings us fellowship in this life

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. This table is a place of refreshment, a place of fellowship. You may not feel restful when we are in the presence of enemies. When a soldier is at war in the presence of enemies, he will eat his meal in haste... but if the Lord is your shepherd, you will eat at the table. Though there may be many cares in this world, if the Lord is your shepherd, you will eat at the table in peace where there is fellowship.

Now what may be the presence of enemies for us? A hostile environment for the Christian faith, tensions in relationships, hardships in your families? Even in those circumstances, can you say “blessed be the name of the Lord?” Even then, the reading of Psalm 23 promises fellowship for the believer.

It’s one thing to eat in the car after you picked up food from the drive through, but it’s a time of rest when you sit down for dinner with your family at the dinner table.

Sometimes you may feel that you do not have time to come to church for a Sunday service because life is just too busy and hectic. However can we make it a habit for us to come out to be in fellowship with each other even if it’s only for one hour in worship at church?

“You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows”

Anointing is for kings, priests, prophets to do the Lord’s work. In Christ, every believer is a priest as 1 Peter 2:9 states “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of life, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”

The Lord will sustain the perseverance of the saints through trials and temptations and give assurance to the faithful that God continues to shower with grace. The Lord’s goodness supplies our needs, His mercy blots out our sins. You and I, if we are born again in Christ, our souls are made alive. Do you see yourself as somebody who needs to be shepherded? How are you guys doing deep down inside? Let us continue to meditate on the Psalms and let us lean on Jesus as He leads us and guides us along the way. In this life of uncertainties, let us lean unto the Lord to shepherd and guide us and let us enjoy His goodness here in this life as we look forward to be with Jesus face to face and enjoy the glory of God forever!