

PSALM 23
“MY SHEPHERD, MY LORD”
Dr. Jay Zinn • River’s Edge Church • 2/14/10

Introduction:

- Belongs in the class of Psalms that breathes confidence and trust in the Lord.
- Ranked with the Lord’s Prayer as one of the two best-known passages in the Bible.
- Author is David, possibly at an advanced period of his life’s experience with God.
- Can be applied to our daily walk as well as our life’s story with a happy ending.

Outline:

- I. God as a Shepherd (vs.1-4) — *The Day’s Journey*.
 - A. A mid day rest (vs. 2). *God as host*.
 - B. Going home (vs. 3).
 - C. Through the valley of “dark shadows” (vs. 4).
- II. God as a Host (vs.5-6) — *The Journey’s End*.
 - A. Safe at home (vs. 5).
 - B. Assurance God would never leave Him.

Psalm 23:1-6

1 The LORD (Christ) is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

“SHEPHERD”

- Who but David could understand this, having been a shepherd himself?
 - He understood both the needs of the sheep and the cares of the shepherd.
- This metaphor of God describes well the kind of watchful care the Lord has for us.
- What an amazing thing that God Almighty would condescend to such a task for us.
- Jesus refers to what a Shepherd does:

John 10:2-4

2 *The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.*

3 *The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

4 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

- The shepherd starts the day to lead the sheep out to pasture. He goes to the gate and calls them by name.
- Their ears are keenly tuned to his voice and only to that voice.
- He leads them out of the sheepfold for their daily journey into the mountainside.

- **NOTE:** David said “MY” Shepherd...implying total *dependence* on GOD!
 - He cares for me, watches over me, supplies my needs, and preserves me.
- It is such dependence, which qualifies us for the “*I SHALL NOT WANT (lack).*”
- And we can only qualify if we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior.
 - Jesus cannot be my shepherd if I am not a sheep
 - I cannot be a sheep unless I have accepted Jesus’ blood as my only way to approach God.
 - Jesus said, “I am the door, no man can come to the Father except through me.”

- **BUT remember!** God guards his sheep as a WHOLE. We are one loaf, one body, and one flock.
 - We are safer under God’s care (umbrella of protection) if we stay with the flock.
 - I’ve been a pastor for over 34 years. My experience is...independent sheep are unprotected sheep.
 - You qualify better for the “*I SHALL NOT WANT*” ...when you hang out with the flock.

William Taylor:

“Each sheep is safer with a Christ-led flock; a man who thinks he can manage his pilgrimage outside the community of Christ neglects the strength that comes from membership in a company and forgets that it is the flock that Christ leads.”

- Also note that this is a *daily* dependence on God.
- The sheep looked to their shepherd *daily*! Not just periodically.
- *I had a rabbit once that died before I forgot to feed it.*
- God wants us to remain dependent on Him for all things, every day. He has a way of doing that.
- God is capable of supplying all our needs.

John 10:9-10

9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.
10 ...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Phil 4:19

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Matt 6:25-26

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?
26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

2 He makes me lie down in green (*a restful color*) pastures (*God's Word*),

- The flock has been awakened and led to the appointed place for nourishment and rest.
- *Green pastures* implies tender green grass and not dry brown grass.
- He *makes* them lie down, completely full and satisfied.
- It is a time to lay in the grass of God's Word and meditate on the Scriptures for nourishment.
- It is a time of rest that God makes us do (body tires or shuts down, Sabbath, sleep, a nap, etc.).
I had a water pump made for only short periods of time (I burned it up because I gave it no break).

He leads me beside quiet waters (Holy Spirit/Dove/Peace/Comforter),

- We cannot get this on our own. God must *lead* us to this place of rest in the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit cleanses, refreshes, and renews us.
- These are not *running* waters which implies shallow, but *quiet* waters which implies "deep."
- The Holy Spirit is a silent comforter:
-a dove, not a crow; the dew, not the hurricane.
-He does not drive us by the Law; but draws us by his love.
- It is in this time of quiet repose that the Lord can speak to us in our prayers.
- In our techno-driven world today we've seemed to have lost the power to RELAX.
- If we never take time to rest or to meditate and contemplate the Lord and his word, we'll not experience the next verse...

3 He restores my soul.

- Through God's word and the refreshing of the Holy Spirit the Shepherd "causes our life to return."
- *Soul* means life or spirit.
- When our spirit is exhausted, wearied, troubled, anxious, worn down with care and toil...
-Our Shepherd re-animates it; brings back its vigor; recharges it; encourages it; excites it to new effort.
- The purpose for this (MID DAY) rest is *to renew our pilgrimage*.
- We need those seasons in life. I've done it twice in my ministry career. I took two sabbaticals from pastoring churches. It was good for us. Roseann and I got rested up.
- We need daily rest, weekly rest, and yearly rest so that we may find our wearied souls restored for the journey of life.

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

- *Paths of righteousness.*

- notice path(s) plural. Right ways or paths that lead to home where we sup and dine with Him.
- Literally means *straight* or *direct* paths.
- The straightest course home involving various paths that God himself chooses for us.

Heb 12:1 - *let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

- The sheep were awakened, taken to the mountainsides of green pastures
- Given rest for tired hoofs and weary legs.
- Now the sun is descending on the horizon and must reach the fold before nightfall.
- Guiding us every step of the way: ***GOD IS IN CONTROL!***

Jer 10:23

I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.

Prov 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

- Much of the vitals in life are not of our choosing:
 - when and where we were born or to whom or in what culture group
 - the opportunities that come our way
 - the shapes of our heads and even their contents
 - our appearance in face, hair, and body structure
 - the so-called accidental happenings which for many determine our future and destiny
 - this all forces the mind to into accepting a PROVIDENTIAL ORDER or we would go insane.
 - God chooses the paths and it is ***FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE!***
 - so that he might ultimately get the glory!
 - how would we ever know God's hand was in our lives if we never had difficulties?
 - every obstacle, every trial, every tragedy, every heartache is an OPPORTUNITY for God to shine

NOTICE the pattern here:

- 1) The time of refreshing and renewal reserves our energies for the journey back, which God chooses.
- 2) He will take us through the straightest course, yet fraught with difficulties, danger, and obstacles.
- 3) Note, too, that the heaviest difficulties do not come in the morning of life, but in the late afternoon (i.e. the "dangerous forties"). A time where God begins to pry our fingers loose of material things (loss of desire, strength, etc.)
- 4) Ready now to go through the darkening shadows of the valley.

4 Even though I walk (not sit and mope, but keep moving) ***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.**

- *walk* and *through*... no sitting, moping, fretting in the valley. Only passing through and moving forward.
 - no stopping to examine the shadows or determine the dangers.
 - it also isn't a jog or run *through* the valley. It's a calm, determined pace— *in pace with the Shepherd.*
 - *temptation to run ahead of the Shepherd's pace for fear of the unknown and get lost!*
- *valley of the shadow of death* — "dark shadows." The sun sets, light dims, yet the Shepherd moves on.
- ***I will fear no evil for YOU ARE WITH ME!***
 - the worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imaginations.
 - If we had no troubles but real troubles, we would not have a tenth of our present sorrows.
- **-Hebrews 13:5-6**

"God has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we say with confidence, the Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."
- No matter how dark, gloomy, or dismal the shadows may be...our Shepherd will lead us safely through!
- Shadow also means the *presence* of light. Remember that the sun still shines in the valley.
- ***Your ROD and your STAFF, they comfort me.***

- ROD = crook or curved stick used to seize the legs of the sheep or goats disposed to run away or fall.
- STAFF = used in walking to lean on and to defend the flock by beating off predators.
- The sight of these brings comfort to the flock.
- It's best to stay focused on the Shepherd through the dark shadows, and not the shadows themselves.

Josh 1:7

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Prov 4:25-27

- 25 *Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.*
 26 *Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.*
 27 *Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.*

Matt 14:25-31

- 25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.
 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.
 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."
 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."
 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.
 30 ***But when he saw the wind, he was afraid*** and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"
 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

2 Cor 11:3

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning (trickery, bait), your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

- Through the valley the rod and staff brings correction & adjustment, as well as deliverance.
- They keep us from getting ahead or straying so that we'll stay in the fold for our safety.
- It brings assurance that God will defend us and protect us in the time of dark shadows.
- It reminds us that we keep our eyes on JESUS, the *author* and *finisher* of our faith!
- It is God's job to GUIDE US back to the zone of safety. Our job is to keep walking with our eyes on Him!

DAILY & THROUGH ALL OF LIFE!

DAILY:

- Awakened by the Shepherd's voice (ears listen for tone, then hear the voice).
- Led out into the world for today's journey.
- Fed by Scripture and satisfied.
- Comforted and calmed by the peace of the Holy Spirit.
- Soul is restored and renewed at mid-day...strengthened for the journey back home.
- Shepherd guides us through diverse paths that lead straight home (i.e. quickest but not easiest).
- Paths lead through dangerous terrain and potential predators.
- The rod and staff guide, support, and protect us in our journey back.

LIFE:

- Became a sheep when I became a Christian.
- Every need seems to be met...every prayer answered as a baby Christian (*I shall not want*).
- My new conversion experiences green pastures and calm waters.
- A time where God is preparing me for the "valley of dark shadows."
- He guides me through my Christian walk through tailor-made tests and trials.
- I learn to trust His leading and not to run ahead or stray from the path.
- Periodically my Shepherd has used his Rod to pull me back in line.
- In my journey home to heaven, I've had seasons where I let my imaginations and fears take hold in the valley.
- I let my fears of the unknown rob me of my peace and had to get my eyes back on the Shepherd.
- If I keep my eyes on the author and finisher of my faith, I'll finish the journey back until I am home with God.

5-6 – *The Journey's End.*

- Notice the abrupt jump from walking through the valley to sitting at a table.
- A kind host is providing generously for his guest.
- In verse 1-4 – God is seen as a Shepherd taking his flock out to pasture and then bringing them back to the fold.
- Now we see them safely returned, enemies glaring outside, sheep safe inside. The shepherd has become a host.
- These last two verses can actually apply to our lives in three ways:
 - 1) to a table of provision during the journey through the shadows of death
 - 2) to the glorious feast in the coming age after Christ returns and we are home with him
 - 3) To the end of the journey of life when we find ourselves at home in heaven.

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

- In our journey through life,
 - when our private spiritual battle is at its bitter peak
 - when we find our energy waning to take another step
 - when it seems the enemies of our soul are about to defeat us...*REMEMBER THE TABLE!*
- JESUS has a spread of refreshment laid out for us.
 - he had dinner prepared for the disciples at the last supper and washed their feet.
 - he had fish broiling on a campfire on shore after their all-night fishing campaign.

John 21:9-13

*9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.
12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."
13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.*

- Ever notice that Jesus ate often in the presence of his glaring enemies? *Matthew, Zaccheus, Pharisee...*
 - they trashed him
 - they ridiculed him
 - they interrogated him
 - but could do nothing to him until his time was up and his Father's purpose fulfilled.
- This same Jesus understands our need for a table of refreshment in the midst of the journey:

Mark 6:31-32

*31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."
32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*

Matt 11:28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

- God invites us to come and sit at his table. Go---taste and see that the Lord is good!

You anoint my head with oil;

- Customary in the ancient Near East for people to anoint their guests with some very fragrant perfume.
- It was an act of respect for a distinguished guest (i.e. woman who poured perfume on Jesus).
- "Oil of gladness" (Isa. 61:3 – Jesus provides us with the oil of gladness in the place of mourning).
- Hebrew "oil" = to make fat or rich. Expresses the presence of abundance.
- Indicates divine favor of prosperity & joy.
- Shepherds at times rubbed healing oils into the fleece of their sheep.
- The Shepherd of our soul goes the second mile in giving all that is required for renewing power and providing comfort.

- An old preacher: “Here is a basin and cool water, wash yourself;
 - here is a towel, too
 - and here is a chair, sit down and rest
 - your dinner will be on the table when you’re ready for it.
 - *NOT ONE POINT OF HOSPITALITY IS NEGLECTED!*

- Nothing is hurried—there is no confusion, no disturbance.
- The enemy is at the door and the Christian can sit down and eat as if everything were in perfect peace.
- The *anointing* of the Holy Spirit on our lives as well brings the oil of joy and gladness to our souls. Because of the peace that passes all understanding and the “boldness” it brings in the face of persecution.

my cup (lot or portion) **overflows.**

- It is not merely full but it is running over.
- In times of adversity we may wonder if we can make it through, but we have more than enough, we have the unlimited resources from an all powerful and awesome God.
- There is a preordained “portion” God has waiting for us to make for all necessary provisions.
- Indicates that God is not a stingy host, but a generous one.

6 Surely goodness and love (mercy) will follow me all the days of my life,

- This thinking is the result of David’s experience with God’s provision and divine protection.
- Based on his experience that God is consistent, there is no *hopefully*, but rather *surely!*
 - God was with him when he killed the lion & the bear*
 - God was with him when he faced Goliath*
 - God was with him when he was a fugitive of Saul running from cave to cave*
 - God was with him in every battle*
 - God was with him when he sinned and repented*
 - God was with him when Absalom formed a coup and ran david out of jerusalem*
 - God was with him to the end when he placed his own son Solomon on his throne*
- no wonder there was such a *certainty* about this with David. God would always be his shepherd and friend!
- Goodness (*good things*) and love (*acts of merciful kindness*)
 - twin guardian angels at his back, beckoning at his back like two *SHEEPDOGS!*

An old Scottish preacher:

-“The Lord is my Shepherd,” he cried, “aye, and more than that, he has two fine collie dogs, Goodness and Mercy.”

-THE MEMORIES OF GOD’S *GOODNESS* AND *LOVE* LEAD MEN TO RIGHT PATHS...

-nip at the heels of our conscious

-MARTYR: “...how I can I turn my back on my God who has loved me so much!

- In the dark days as well as the bright days
In the days of fasting and in the days of feasting
In the dreary days of winter as well as the sunny days of summer...Goodness & Love will follow me.

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Hebrew: “throughout the years; as long as my days”).

- While I’m here, I’ll be a child at home with my God.
- Language of those whose occupation was to live close and minister in the courts of God.
- David had the ark of the covenant brought into his city near his house...to be near the Lord.