

The Good Shepherd

Sunday, June 28, 2020

I have been asking God what I need to preach on in light of all that has been going on in our world these past few months. This week, I felt like he was drawing me to a passage that we are all familiar with - Psalm 23. I have been meditating on it all week long and feel like David's message about the shepherd of his life is what the Holy Spirit wants us to hear right now. Interestingly enough, on two separate occasions this week God confirmed this in my heart in a powerful way as I happened upon two unrelated sources, one in an email from a ministry and one a social media post, both of which referenced this verse.

So, let's start with a verse from the New Testament that ties in with this powerful passage and then spend a few minutes reflecting on Psalm 23

John 10:11, 14(NIV)

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—

Psalm 23 English Standard Version (ESV)

A Psalm of David.

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.^[a] ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness^[a] for his name's sake ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[a] I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely^[a] goodness and mercy^[a] shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell^[a] in the house of the LORD forever.^[a]

23 The Lord

There is only one Lord and God. There is only one way to heaven, Jesus. He alone is our master. We cannot serve God and this world. We cannot listen to multiple voices when trying to determine which way to go. Like the sheep we must know our shepherds voice and learn to follow it

is

Right now... and always. Signifying a current presence with us.... Always in the present moment with us. As God identified himself to Moses and told him to use these words to describe him to the Israelites who were suffering under the oppression of the Egyptians.... I am...

my shepherd;

The psalm will teach us the characteristics of this shepherd, but here I want to reflect on the word my... it denotes ownership and possession... not in the sense of us owning the shepherd but the shepherd owning us....

Is he your shepherd?

Not my mom and dad's shepherd.... Not my pastors shepherd... Not my denominations shepherd.... Not my friends shepherd.... But MY shepherd

Jesus said... I know my sheep and my sheep know me.... We make him OUR shepherd when we enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ....

I shall not want.

Not lacking anything. We need to be reminded that because we have a good shepherd, we have all that we need

2 Peter 1:3 (NIV)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

“We have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because the Lord is my shepherd.” – Charles Spurgeon

David now turns his attention to the specifics of The Shepherd-Kings provision for our lives

Isaiah wrote, “He [the Lord] tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” ([Isa 40:11](#))

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Green Pastures

Contrary to Western imagery, the desert was the landscape of the ancient shepherd. The “green pastures” ([Ps 23:2](#)) were often few and far between and offered little more than small tufts of grass. The desert shepherd traveled miles to ensure the flock had enough to eat.

God in his wisdom and care for us knows what we need.

Jesus says in Mathew 6:8.

8 ...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Along with the physical provision of sustaining food we see here the rest that we need for our souls.

Matthew 11:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Oh how we need God to “make us lie down in green pastures right now”

He leads me beside still waters.[\[a\]](#)

[Psalm 23:2](#) Hebrew *beside waters of rest*

Shepherds must always have water as their chief concern. Sheep and goats cannot survive on their own in the deserts of Israel. Water is the most precious resource. A good shepherd knows how to find the hidden springs or how to collect the seasonal flood waters that rush down the desert canyons in the winter months.

Once again, we see the importance of physical provision combined with the image of emotional and spiritual provision. Specifically, here we see the peace of God which Paul says in Philippians 4:7

Philippians 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

More than ever I need the peace of God to fill my soul, to be led by quiet waters and find calm in a world filled with anxiety and unrest and I am trusting my good shepherd to lead me there

3 He restores my soul.

In verse 2 David combined the physical, spiritual and emotional in one picture. Here he turns singularly to our deep spiritual need for restoration. I can have all of my physical needs met, but if I do not have spiritual restoration I am lost. I need the cleansing love of Jesus Christ to forgive my sin and make me in right standing with God

He leads me in paths of righteousness[b] for his name's sake.

[Psalm 23:3](#) *Or in right paths*

Lately I have felt a lot like Pilates response to Jesus in John 18 where he said” what is truth”

But this characteristic of the good shepherd assures me that God will lead me into all truth if I am careful to wait upon him and follow him obediently

Psalm 25:5 (ESV)

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

John 16:13 (ESV)

¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,[c]

[Psalm 23:4](#) *Or the valley of deep darkness*

I want to pause at this point in verse 4 for just a minute and acknowledge, as David did, the reality of the deep darkness that we must sometimes walk through in this life.

There is a lot of darkness in the world right now. I just received a phone call yesterday from the sister-in-law of my sister's husband. This is the sister who took her own life last year after struggling with severe depression and anxiety for quite some time. She was at the funeral and called me to ask me a couple of things because her granddaughter who was 21 years old committed suicide this past week. I asked her if she thought the her granddaughter's depression was exacerbated by the covid lockdowns. She said YES

Sometimes we may wonder, "is God in this". But if you've read His word, you know that this is all a part of his plan.

Matthew 24:3-14 (ESV)

Signs of the End of the Age

³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away^[a] and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

As you can see from this one passage, there is a lot of darkness that accompanies the last days and I believe we are living in the midst of the last days

This does not cancel out the promises that we have just read.

I will fear no evil,

In the midst of this darkness we need to have the calm assurance that declares “I will fear no evil”. We need to start casting out fear in Jesus name. The devil wants you to be afraid, because when you are afraid you do stupid things, you stop trusting the one you’re supposed to be following, you begin trying to figure out your own directions, you get lost in the dark, you take steps in the wrong direction, you get off the path and you get hurt

for you are with me;

Read it again... that is our assurance, that is our peace, that is our strength. He is and always will be with us. He declares it again and again “I will never leave you, I will never forsake you”. And as the writer of Hebrews declares in chapter 13 verse 6; because of this we say with confidence “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Rod and Staff

The phrase “rod and staff” is commonly thought to be a metaphor for judgment or punishment. However a rod was something of a club used for protection. It is also the same word used for a royal scepter (see [Ps 2:9](#)). The staff could also be a weapon against wild animals or enemies but was also a walking stick and a prod for guidance. The rod and staff brought comfort, guidance and protection, even in the darkest valley.

Pictures of protection, guidance, discipline, and correction should bring us comfort yet there are many who rise up in rebellion and refuse Gods offer of protection and guidance because they do not want to surrender to his discipline and correction

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

Here indeed is a powerful verse for us to hold on to during this time and in the days to come. In the midst of great difficulty, life continues because God provides for us. Life goes on, even when the enemy is present all around us. God still cares for us, God still provides for us, we still need to eat, we still need to live. Look around and you will find that in spite of the presence of the enemy God has prepared good things for you. Will you still serve God if things get worse?

It is interesting to note that David seemed to serve God more faithfully when he was on the run from Saul. When his enemies were all around. Once he became king, he struggled with and gave in to temptation.

I want to talk more about this next week... But what if God is stripping away our comfort and prosperity in order to get us to wake up and draw close to him.

you anoint my head with oil;

Oil was used by shepherds to soothe and heal the irritations and wounds a sheep experienced. We know that oil in the Bible is the symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The psalm teaches us here that God is ready to bring healing to our life. With the presence of enemies comes wounds that need healed. God is our healer

I'm so glad that God wants to anoint us with the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. I need that power right now

my cup overflows.

Perhaps it is the thought of all that God does for us that causes David to say, "my cup overflows." And indeed it does. Like the words of Luke 6:38... Pressed down, shaken together and running over it will be poured into our laps

It also reminds me of the streams of living water that come forth because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives

John 7:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as^[a] the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive...

6 Surely[d] goodness and mercy[e] shall follow (pursue) me all the days of my life,

Of course, we see this verse as relating to more of the blessing brought about by being one of the good shepherd's sheep. That is true! But the deeper I studied this verse the more I felt the Holy Spirit leading me to a second meaning for this phrase.

Allow me to expound for just a minute... The psalm is about being one of God's Sheep... it talks about the benefits of being in his flock. What he does for us. But there is an assumption here. And that is that I am following.

When we get to this verse, we see a couple of interesting translation possibilities that made me think of applying this verse in a different way. What if, as David closes this psalm, he wanted to emphasize the importance of following this shepherd he had been talking about.

- a. [Psalm 23:6](#) Or Only
- b. [Psalm 23:6](#) Or steadfast love

Verb: רָדַף (*rādap*), GK 8103 (S 7291), 144x. *rādap* means “to pursue, follow after, persecute.” It is commonly used in a military sense, where one party pursues another with harmful intent

So, what if there is a double meaning that goes something like this...

I need to pursue the good things of God all my life. I need to steadfastly follow him with all my heart and as I do all these things will continue to be poured into my life.

“He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor” ([Prov 21:21](#))

From "The Student Prince" 1954. Edmund Purdom lip-synching to Mario Lanza's recordings.

I'll Walk With God
RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra

I'll walk with god
From this day on
His helping hand I'll lean upon
This is my prayer my humble plea
May the lord be ever with me

There is no death though eyes grow dim
There is no fear when I'm near to him
I'll lean on him forever
And he'll forsake me never

He will not fail me as long as my faith is strong
What ever road I may walk alone

I'll walk with god
I'll take his hand
I'll talk with god he'll understand
I'll pray to him
Each day to him

And he'll hear the words that I say
His hand will guide my throne and rod
And I'll never walk alone
While I walk with god

and I shall dwell[f] in the house of the Lord forever.[g]

The results of being led by our good shepherd and our faithful pursuit in obediently following him