

Ps 23 (ESV) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ⁽²⁾ He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ⁽³⁾ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁽⁴⁾ 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. ⁽⁵⁾ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁽⁶⁾ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

1. We would all admit that life isn't always easy

- A. There are many obstacles along the way
Circumstances we face can be confusing and even frightening
Needs arise that can be overwhelming – will ends meet this month?
 - 1). If you can relate to that – then this Psalm was written for you
- B. The Psalms have always been where God's people flee for comfort
 - 1). Because they are so real – honest - here are individuals wrestling with very real problems
 - a). Many times they start out struggling – “God where are you – what are you doing?”
But we watch how they find a place of peace and victory
 - 2). The Psalms have a special place in my heart
 - a). As a young believer I didn't know how to pray – so I prayed the Psalms
I feel like I was disciplined on how to pray by David
 - 3). But of all the Psalms – Psalm 23 stands alone in its beauty and comfort
 - a). Spurgeon referred to it as the “Pearl of the Psalms”
 - b). J. Stewart Perowne said in his commentary on Psalm 23
“There is no psalm in which the absence of all doubt, misgiving, fear [and] anxiety is so remarkable.”
 - 1a). Your spiritual ears should perk up when hearing that
 - 2a). This Psalm is able to deliver me from doubt, fear, and anxiety? Yes!
 - 3a). This should create a desire to know this Psalm so well it changes your life
- C. This is the Psalm you want to learn to run to when life turns South
 - 1). Because it will bring God before you in such an intimate way
 - a). Here we see God as the divine shepherd – faithfully, lovingly - caring for those who are his
 - 2). Here we see the incredible blessings that he wants to pour into our lives
 - a). Here is the potential of the Christina life
 - b). I'm calling this series “The song of contented sheep”
 - 1a). Because that is the picture here – sheep (us) lying down peacefully, joyfully and contentedly – because we have a shepherd who is caring for us
 - 3). I love what Rod Mattoon said of this Psalm in his book “Treasure from the Psalms”
“This wonderful psalm has the perfumed fragrance of perpetual peace, secure serenity, triumphant trust, and confident calm. Not even the shadow of death troubles David.”
 - a). I'm looking forward to spending time drenching ourselves in the goodness of God

Transition: Today is just an introduction – so let's look at some misc. details

I. MISCELLANEOUS DETAILS ABOUT PSALM 23

1. The author: Most scholars agree David wrote this Psalm

- A. The one who was a shepherd himself wrote about the divine shepherd

2. When did he write it? Breaks up into two camps)

- A. Some believe it was written by David in his teen years - while he was still a shepherd

- 1). As he sat in the wilderness caring for his sheep
He began to reflect on the Lord's care for his people
 - a). He began to record the thoughts of how good it was to be under God's care
- B. Others (including myself) believe it was written later – when David was King
 - 1). The reason being – there is maturity here – a wisdom that seems to flow out of experience
 - a). Plus – he knew what it meant to be in the danger of death (v. 4)
And he knew what it meant to have enemies (v. 5)
 - b). These seem to be words of one who has had his share of trouble
But one who has seen the faithfulness of the Lord through it all

Thought: I'm sure as he wrote he reflected on the time he was a shepherd
But here he writes as a sheep – overwhelmed by the divine shepherd's faithful care

- A. Here is the writing of one looking back in amazement
 - 1). Who recalls the defeat of the giant Goliath
 - 2). Being chased around by the jealous Saul
 - 3). He remembers his fall with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah
 - 4). The rebellion of his Son Absalom – who rose up and stole the kingdom for a time

Point: We could probably add much more to this list

- A. But Psalm 23 (I believe) is written by a man who enjoyed celebrated success
And suffered humiliating defeat - A man well acquainted with trouble
- B. Yet as he looks back he sees the thread of divine faithfulness running through it all
 - 1). So he pens 6 verses that speak of how amazing it is to be in the flock of God
6 verses that are meant to be taken off the pages of the Bible and used in our life

Transition: Seen the author and when it was written

3. The cast of characters: There are two

- A. The Shepherd = Jesus Christ (The title he gave himself in the NT)
- B. The sheep = Those who have embraced Christ by faith
 - 1). The blessings of this Psalm are to a limited audience
Only those who have seen they are sinners and have trusted in Christ as their only hope of forgiveness and heaven

4. The placement of the Psalm: How it fits into the Scriptures

- A. The Bible is accurate in what it says – but it also has a precision as to where it says it
- B. Psalm 23 is sandwiched in-between 22-24 = a trilogy of Psalms known as Messianic Psalms
 - 1). Psalms teaching about the Messiah who would come some 1000 years later
 - 2). It is no accident these 3 Psalms are ordered the way they are – it is powerful - intentional

Transition: To understand the richness of this Psalm we must understand those Psalms around it

- A. These 3 Psalms exalt God's grace by showing how he deals with all of our life
 - 1). Past – present - future: They show what God has done for the saint in the past
What he is doing for them in the present – and what he will do in the future

THE PAST: Psalm 22 Portrays Jesus Agony on The Cross

- A. David writing under the Spirit's inspiration paints Christ's suffering in vivid colors
 - 1). Our Lord being stripped naked – the piercing of his hands and feet
His thirst – the mocking and the humiliation
 - 2). David even records the words our Lord would speak

- a). The cry “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”
- b). Even the words the mocking crowds would shout out

"Is this the one who relies on the LORD? Then let the LORD save him! If the LORD loves him so much, let the LORD rescue him!"

B. In Psalm 22 we see what it cost our Lord to get us into heaven

- 1). He was forsaken so we could be forgiven
- 2). He was physically crushed so we could be healed
- 3). He was willing to die so we could live for all of eternity in glory

C. Here we see the payment being made for every one of our sins

Eph 1:7 (NIV) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...

- 1). Here is our security and peace when we look back on our past
 - a). If you're like me you see so many failures – things you are embarrassed about
Things you can't believe you did
- 2). Our comfort is found by looking back on the cross and seeing our Lord dying for us
 - a). As his blood was shed my sin was being cleansed – until it was completely erased
 - b). Because Christ shed his blood – God now has nothing against me
- 3). Friends do you have those things in the past you regret
Those things you would give anything to have a “Do-over”
 - a). Know this – Christ died knowing all that you would do
As his precious blood was being shed – your record of sins was being cleansed
 - b). When he cried out “It is finished” it was – there was no sin left in your account

Is 43:25 (ESV) “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

- 1a). Blots out = completely gone – no trace of it left
- 2a). Then he promises – I choose not to remember it any longer
“Rather than seeing your sin I focus on the result of my Son’s blood. As far as I am concerned, you stand before me as if you’ve never sinned.”

D. I know some of you have a problem when it comes to forgiving yourself of sin

- 1). But you're hanging on to something God promises is not in the books any longer
You're refusing to forget what God promises to not remember
- 2). Honor the work of Christ on your behalf in the same way God the Father does
 - a). If the Father says the blood of his Son was sufficient to cleanse you of all sin
Are you going to continue to act like it isn't
 - b). Honor the work of Christ by believing his blood did what he said it did

Transition: Christian that's your past taken care of – all cleansed by the work of Christ at the cross

A. That's Psalm 22

THE FUTURE: Psalm 24 Portrays Our Lord in Glory

- A. This Psalm is only 10 verses but it takes us into the glorious city of our soon coming king
- B. David writes of the joy of the enthronement of Christ
 - 1). He is seen as the King of glory and the everlasting Lord of Hosts
 - 2). We are reminded that because he lives so will we
 - a). Paul writing from this side of the cross speaks of the resurrection
Because he was raised we will be too

2 Co 4:14 (ESV) knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

Jesus put it this way: Jn 11:25–26 (ESV) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ⁽²⁶⁾ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Point: Because of Christ’s work in Psalm 22 – Psalm 24 is a reality – we will be with him

- A. That is true for everyone who has saving faith in Christ
 - 1). Those who have seen their sin and have gone to him as their only hope of cleansing
 - 2). Those who trust in him alone for their forgiveness and entrance into heaven

Transition: So that is our past and future – but what about NOW – today – that is Psalm 23

THE PRESENT: Psalm 23 Speaks of Our Present Experience Under Our Lord’s Care

- A. We come out of the brutality of the crucifixion in Psalm 22
And suddenly we’re lying down in green pastures and resting besides still waters
 - 1). In Psalm 22 we see the cost of love for our Savior – the immensity of his love on display
 - 2). In Psalm 23 we see how that love flows into our every day living
 - a). Psalm 22 he was the good shepherd lying down his life for his sheep
Jn 10:11 (ESV) I am the *good shepherd*. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
 - b). Psalm 23 he is the good shepherd caring daily for those sheep he died for

B. The beauty of the title “Good shepherd”

- 1). This is a title that Jesus willingly and gladly took upon himself
- 2). It was a disgrace to be a bad shepherd
 - a). You could tell the good and bad shepherds by the condition of their flock
- 3). The good shepherd took on the responsibility of caring for every need the sheep had
 - a). He made sure they were moved to good pasture land – well fed
He made sure they were protected from every predator
 - b). He took care of them so well – sheep who are naturally timid and skittish - fearful
Could lie down and rest = resting in his complete care for them

Point: Jesus willingly took on this title “Good shepherd” to comfort us

- 1). Those who heard it in those days would know exactly what he was saying
 - a). His flock would be well taken care of - every need would be met
- C. The application of this truth – why you want to make this Psalm your own
 - 1). This truth is so comforting it has the power to remove every bit of anxiety
 - 2). Worry is a big problem - Some of you are well acquainted with it
 - a). There’s a lot of you – one man made a living off of worriers
 - 1a). Advertised – send him money he’d worry for you – people were doing it
 - b). Giving away your worries is biblical – God commands us to do it
1 Pe 5:7 (ESV) casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.
 - 1a). Notice the potential – cast all our anxieties – anything that causes worry
He says “Don’t carry those worries. I didn’t create you to be strong enough to handle life on your own. Cast them on me. I love you and will help you.”
 - 3). Its Biblical to give our worries to another – but it matters who that “other” is
 - a). The man charging money really couldn’t do anything about the problems
 - b). But Jesus the good shepherd loved us enough to die for us – he wants to help

- 1a). But that wouldn't be enough if he wasn't God who could help
- 2a). As our shepherd he has taken on the *responsibility* to help us
And because he is God meeting that responsibility to care for us is easy

Thought: We are in a passage where every verse is designed to move us into those green pastures of rest
Those still waters of contentment and satisfaction

- A. We are going to learn truth to carry into our day – truth to help us in whatever circumstances we face
John Stevenson: There is a depth of meaning in every sentence—a rich variety of experience in every verse—and a fullness of joy from its commencement to its conclusion, which comprehends all that is needed in life and in death, in time and throughout eternity.”
- B. This is truth that leads you to the abundant life that Jesus promised
John 10:10 (ESV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
John 10:10 (AMP) ... I came that they may have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).
1). Does that sound good? Then we are at the right passage to guide us into that life

Transition: So what do we see in this set of Messianic Psalms

- A. Psalm 22 takes us to the ugliness of a cross set on a hill outside of Jerusalem
1). Where God's forgiving love is seen in all its immensity
- B. Psalm 23 transports us into the beauty of being a sheep under the shepherd's care
1). The one who loved me enough to die for me Ps. 22
Now expresses that love in caring for me Ps. 23
a). That shepherd who tends his flock (you and I) with untiring devotion!
- C. Psalm 24 reminds us that glory is waiting
1). My shepherds loving care doesn't stop at the grave
It extends throughout eternity – it will bring me into glory with him
Jud 24 (ESV) Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,

III. WHERE WE ARE HEADED

1. We are going to spend some weeks staring into the grace of God

- A. Didn't we just do that in Ephesians – Yes – but this is different
1). We learned the theological concepts of grace Ephesians – mountain peaks
2). Here we look at how that grace flows into our life in a daily manner
Example: Ps 23:6 (ESV) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
a). What a truth to wake up to every morning
Today God's goodness and mercy will relentlessly pursue me
Tomorrow will be the same
1a). Because I am a sheep under the good shepherd's care

2. Why this Psalm is so powerful

- A. Because these words redirect our focus from us and our circumstances to God and his resources
The result is joy, peace, rest and contentment
1). Life will consistently throw negative circumstances our way
a). This Psalm will give us the truth that enables us to lie down and rest

- 2). You have needs? We will trust in the one who said “You shall not want”
- 3). You feel you can’t go on – He said he will restore your soul
- 4). Are you confused? He said he will guide you
- 5). Are you afraid? He said you should fear no evil because he’s with you

B. This Psalm carries us through life on earth – telling us about daily blessings
Then finally assures us of glory with Christ

Ps 23:6 (ESV) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

- 1). There is comfort here for everything you go through
- 2). Promises so comprehensive – truth so deep it will take all of eternity to fully comprehend
 - a). F.B. Meyer in his exposition of Psalm 23 recorded these words about Psalm 23
"That is my creed." I need, I desire no other! I learned it from my mother's lips. I have repeated it every morning when I awoke for the last twenty years. Yet I do not half understand it; I am only beginning now to spell out its infinite meaning, and death will come on me with the task unfinished.
 - 1a). In 40 years I have read this Psalm a hundred times – taught it twice
I expect this time to be completely different - deeper
 - 2a). My understanding of God’s faithfulness has expanded
I’ve had more years to watch all these promises fulfilled in my life
And I can testify all these promises are sure

Thought: It will take all of eternity to grasp these truths completely – why?

Because this is divine love on display – the fullness of God caring for his children

- A. For all of eternity we will be seeing fresh revelations of God’s love for us
- B. And because this is divine love on display – who is able to ascend these heights as a teacher
 - 1). My vocabulary cannot ascend to the peaks that this seemingly simple Psalm declares
Therefore, I need the Lord’s help and I need you to pray for me

Transition: Let’s go back to what we saw in the beginning – the title given to the newspaper

The Lord is my shepherd AND that is enough

- A. That would be a good subtitle for this series
 - 1). The song of the contented sheep who have learned that
The Lord is their shepherd and that is enough

CONCLUSION

1. Today just an introduction to this wonderful Psalm – next week we’ll dig in

- A. I would suggest you read this Psalm a few times during the week
This is a Psalm you want to be well acquainted with