

Psalm 23

Bible Reading – Psalm 23 (New King James Version)

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.*

*² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.*

*³ He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

*⁴ Yea, 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 runs over.*

*⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.*

SERMON

I suppose the 23rd Psalm is the best known Psalm in the Bible.

And for me, its writer is one of the most amazing and awesome men of God you can read about in the Old Testament.

So far as I know, King David is the only man described in the Bible as 'A man after God's own heart'.

If you read the first book of Samuel chapter 16 you will find that David was considered a two-bit-nobody (My words, not God's)!

You see, David was the son of a man called Jesse. David had seven brothers. God sent Samuel (a respected prophet and Judge of Israel) to Jesse to anoint one of his sons as King, to succeed the first appointed King of Israel a man named Saul.

When Samuel met with Jesse, he asked him to parade his sons before him and Jesse fetched 7 of his sons, but David was not included amongst them!

David was the youngest, a teenager and he was a shepherd. He was out in the fields tending some sheep and goats and after Samuel had inspected the 7 sons presented to him, he asked if there were any others, since God told him none of these was the chosen one. And so Jesse sent for David, and Samuel anoints him as the future King, even though his father had not even considered him a candidate.

If you read about David – and you may well have done – you will see that some of the gifts and attributes God saw in David were humility, loyalty and integrity. To be honest when I read about David I just think his integrity is way beyond any other person I have ever met or read about. Yes he did succumb to sin as he got older but he was filled with grief over it. He repented and asked God to forgive Him which He did. There were painful consequences for David because of his sins of adultery and murder and there are lessons there for us all to learn but God continued to love David as David loved God.

Anyway, getting back to Psalm 23, I wanted to set the scene with some background to David because, as I said, David was a shepherd. He knew all about good shepherds because he was one. He was better than a good shepherd – he was the kind of shepherd I would want to have looking after me if I was a sheep.

We read in the Bible that David killed lions and bears with his bare hands to keep safe his sheep. God gave him his extraordinary physical powers.

So when David wrote ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want’, he was an authority on the subject – he knew how to ensure his sheep wanted for nothing.

In 2 Samuel 5, we learn that God told David he would ‘shepherd His people Israel and be ruler over Israel’.

As a young shepherd boy, David always did the best for his sheep. As King he tried hard to do the best for his people. How much more does our Lord want the best for those of us who love Him? So let’s take comfort from the words:

***‘He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.’***

What an amazing God. Green pastures – still waters – happy sheep.

For us that would mean he provides for us, **all** that we need. Not always what we want – but all that we need. There is a difference isn’t there.

When we are stressed, concerned or anxious, we can turn to Him and He will restore our soul.

As the hymn writer wrote 300 years ago:

'My soul He doth restore again, And me to walk doth make

Within the paths of righteousness, E'en for His own Name's sake'

When we set about our day, if we ask Him, He will ensure we go the right way, the best way, so that we do not go the wrong way which will cause unnecessary suffering for ourselves. If the Lord Jesus is our shepherd, we can trust Him for this. That is the promise of the Scripture.

Then David goes on to talk about when things get difficult, as they will do for those who are followers of Christ. He reassures His followers:

Yea, 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.

Do you know that God is with you? Right now, whatever is troubling you? He just wants you to lean on Him. He can bare your weight on His shoulders. Nothing is too difficult for God.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 11 verses 29 and 30 "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. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

What a picture. The wooden yoke on the backs of the oxen. The oxen pulling the plough through hard ground, breaking it up.

When two oxen are yoked together the burden of their work is halved. Jesus says take His yoke, put it on yourself – it's easy, the burden is then light indeed. The Lord is there to offer you His comfort – The burden may still remain, BUT He promises to relieve it if you will ask and allow Him.

Do you feel His comfort when the going gets tough?

If you want a burden lifted, lean on Him and receive rest and comfort for your soul.

Next, in verse 5 He says:

'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

What a picture!

In one of my favourite modern worship songs about God's banner of love being over me and you, the opening line is, 'He brought me to His banqueting table.'

David knew God's love was unlike any other kind of love. Totally unconditional! Do you know that in Heaven we will dine with the King? And His table probably won't have cornflakes on it (Sorry if you like Cornflakes). The food and drink God has in mind for His people will taste exquisite, like nothing we've ever tasted, I am quite sure.

And today in this life David says even in the presence of our enemies God prepares a lavish table before us full of all that is best. David says **'God, you anoint my head with oil'** and although that was correct in the sense that God anointed him as King, I think David had something else in mind here. I think he was saying something like "you look at me and see your perfect creation whom you love so much that you will stop at nothing to ensure the best for me – You make me feel like a King and I want for nothing – my cup overflows with your awesome provision."

And that's the way God intends it, for you and me.

This short Psalm ends with these words:

***'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.'***

So sure was David of God's love and grace that he knew for certain that throughout his future life God's goodness and merciful nature would encompass him, and his faith in God was such that he knew, so long as he continued to walk with God and not turn his back on Him, He would inherit eternal life and spend forever with His Father.

How is your faith today? Do you know that you know that God loves you, He is faithful to you and will be forever? Are you sure that when you say, think or do things you shouldn't or when you do not do things you know you should, He is waiting to forgive you.

And like any good Father He just wants you to say 'Sorry Father I was wrong, please forgive me.' So long as the apology is sincere, the relationship is then restored and your peace will return just as it does when you genuinely make up with someone you have upset or caused pain to.

David was the second King of Israel and it seems clear to me he was what is often referred to theologically as a 'type of Christ'. What I mean by that is that he was a picture of what The Messiah might be like, when God decided centuries later to send The Messiah (Jesus) to save His people, the Jews.

David was human and therefore sinful in nature even though for many of the years of his life he demonstrated for all to see his ability and desire to show self-control and restraint when

temptation and the powers of darkness came against him. The Messiah would be perfect in every way. The religious leaders and ordinary folk who lived 2,000 years ago thought The Messiah, like David, would destroy all their physical human enemies.

They expected Him to be a mighty powerful warrior Messiah. As we know, most of the people of Jesus' time didn't recognise that The Messiah had come when Jesus walked the Holy Land performing miracles. One of the main reasons was that they failed to understand that The Messiah **would** destroy all their enemies but NOT their human ones.

The Messiah's role when He came was to destroy mankind's spiritual enemies - those powers of darkness that are behind human sin and evil. On the Cross, Jesus defeated the Devil and his minions for all time. The War is won even though battles rage all around us.

But Jesus **Will** soon return to deliver all those who have put their faith in Him – whether dead or alive at His return - into the dwelling house about which David talked where there will be an unimaginably wonderful daily feast with the King of all Kings and the Lord of all Lords – in our Heavenly Home.

David described God as the Good Shepherd. This is how the New Testament writers described Jesus, the Son of God – God made flesh:

Matthew in chapter 9 of his Gospel said (NLT):

'But when Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.'

The disciple John, was the disciple who had the closest relationship with the Lord. In John and chapter 10 we read these sentences (NLT):

'Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. ¹⁰ The thief's purpose (He's talking about the devil) is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. (Here Jesus is talking about us – the Gentiles). They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

24 The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. 26 But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, 29 for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one."

So there we are then. Jesus, our Saviour, **IS** The Good Shepherd. He answered the people clearly. He told them 'The Father and I are one'.

The Good Shepherd cares deeply for you and for me. He loves us unconditionally, and to those who turn and follow Him, He promises the gift of eternal life.

I'll let the disciple John have the last word. He wrote the last book of the Bible (the book of Revelation) and in Chapter 7 he records a vision of the People of God in Heaven and he tells us this (NLT):

***"...They stand in front of God's throne
and serve him day and night in his Temple.
And he who sits on the throne
will give them shelter.
16 They will never again be hungry or thirsty;
they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.
17 For the Lamb on the throne
will be their Shepherd.
He will lead them to springs of life-giving water.
And God will wipe every tear from their eyes."***

And I respond, 'Come soon Lord Jesus, we long to be with you, forever!' AMEN!