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## “The Shepherd Psalms Part 2” Psalm 23

There can be a lot of anxiety around the capitol. Will I win my next election? Will my party stay in power? Will the people I support get the position of leadership? How is the state budget doing? Are my PEIA costs going to increase? These may be relatively small anxieties compared to what we face in life. Illnesses. Family struggles. Financial troubles. Temptation, sin, and failure. All these bring about great anxiety and worry.

There is no passage in the Bible that helps us with our worries and anxieties than Psalm 23. It is likely the most familiar chapter in the Bible, often read at some of the most challenging times in life. In it we have the “sheep’s eye view” of the Shepherd and in its truths, we can find comfort, peace, and contentment even in the middle of the greatest of trials and the darkest of valleys.

There are many pictures used to describe God in the Psalms and throughout the rest of the Bible. He is the Creator. He is the King. He is the Judge. He is our Rock. There is probably no more comforting picture given us than that of our Shepherd as we see in Psalm 23:

- <sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.***
- <sup>2</sup>He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.***
- <sup>3</sup>He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***
- <sup>4</sup>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***
- <sup>5</sup>Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.***
- <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***

In our last study we looked at how Psalm 22, 23, 24 are together called the “shepherd Psalms”. All three Psalms, although written by David 1,000 years before His coming, point to and are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 22 we see **the cross** - the Good Shepherd dying for His sheep and rising again from the Dead. (John 10:11) We learn of what Christ did for us in the **past**.

In Psalm 24 we see **the crown** – the Chief Shepherd coming for the sheep and to rule and reign over all creation. (1 Peter 5:4) We look forward to what Christ will do in the **future**.

Now, in Psalm 23 we see **the (shepherd’s) crook** – the Great Shepherd caring and providing for His sheep. (Hebrews 13:20) We see what Christ is doing for us in the **present**. This wonderful Psalm describes how our Great Shepherd lives to care for us each day.

There are two vivid pictures or illustrations given us in Psalm 23 – The Good Shepherd and the Gracious Host:

### **The Good Shepherd**

**The Great Shepherd gives provision to His sheep.** He provides food and water as He makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us by still waters. How does Jesus lead us and feed us today? He does this for us primarily through His word and through the means of grace He gives us in a good church. One of the primary ways He feeds is through a good pastor who teaches the Word of God. When Peter was restored to fellowship and ministry, Jesus’ command to him was “**feed my sheep**” (John 21:15-17). Peter exhorts elders and pastors to “**shepherd the flock of God**” as they are striving to please “the Chief Shepherd” – Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:1-4) God has gifted these men to feed us and to lead us, and our local church is the primary way He provides for us today!

**The Great Shepherd restores us.** When we are tired, suffering, and weak, we need our strength restored. When we have wandered away from God, we need our relationship and fellowship to be restored. As David confessed his terrible sin he cried out to God, ***“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...”*** (Psalm 51:12).

**The Great Shepherd guides us.** We may be led to green pastures and by still waters. But we may (will) also be led through the valley of the shadow of death. Both the best of times and worst of time are part of His plan for us.

**The Great Shepherd is present with us.** Perhaps the most significant statement in the entire Psalm is ***“Thou art with me”***. His presence, along with His rod and staff – the tools He uses – brings us comfort and peace.

There is a phrase in the description of all that the Great Shepherd does for us that we often overlook. Why does the Shepherd provide for us, restore us, and guide us? It is ***“...For His name’s sake”*** (vs. 3). While all God does for us is for our good, it is ultimately for His Glory!

When we read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, we cannot help but think of Jesus’ words in John 10: ***“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”*** (John 10:11). Through most of the chapter Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd and believers as sheep who hear His voice and follow Him.

### **The Gracious Host**

In verse five the picture in Psalm 23 shifts from that of the Great Shepherd to that of the Gracious Host. It is the picture of a wonderful banquet or feast. That it is prepared in the presence of enemies may mean that our host is keeping our enemies from harming us or it may refer to a victory celebration where the defeated enemies look on with regret. This describes the hospitality that was shown to guests in that culture. It vividly describes for us the grace God has shown us. Anointing our head with oil speaks of how God makes us clean and acceptable and welcomes us into His presence. Our cup running over describes how God makes all His resources available to us. All this is done out of His grace. We do not deserve any of these blessings, yet we read of how ***“...In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.”*** (Ephesians 1:7-8)

### **Knowing the Shepherd in the Valley**

Notice difference between verses 1-3 and 4-5. In the first three verses David refers to God as “He”, speaking of God in the third person. “The Lord is my shepherd...He makes me lie down...He restores my soul...He leads me.” Then in verse 4 he switches to the more personal and intimate “You” (“Thou”). Here we see the difference between talking *about* God and talking *to* God. In Psalm 23 we see a list of all that God does for us. Then we see the prayer of one crying out to God in the middle of the valley. As we study God and His Word, we should switch often to prayers to God of worship, praise, thanks, and cries for His help. It is the valleys that drive us to this response as we then realize our dependence on Him. In the valley we may be in danger of anger or bitterness toward God. But in the green pasture we face an even greater danger of becoming satisfied and forgetting the Shepherd!

### **Seeing Jesus in Psalm 23**

Jesus is obviously presented in Psalm 23 as the Good Shepherd. But we gain an even greater appreciation of all that He did for us when we see Him as the singer of this Psalm

We see Jesus as the representative singer when we consider the trials and difficulties leading up to His crucifixion. He walked through that valley of death for us. In His human nature He depended upon the Father to lead, guide, and deliver Him. Let us remember His life and suffering as we read the words of this Psalm.

We see Jesus as the ultimate singer as we recognize no one walked a darker valley or faced such enemies as Him.

We see Christ as the returning singer as we look forward to all that He is preparing for us and to the great marriage feast we will celebrate with Him!

***Can we say of Jesus “The Lord is MY shepherd”?***

***Are we trusting Him as our Good Shepherd and our Gracious Host?***

***Do we truly understand and appreciate all Christ did for us as we see Him singing this Psalm?***

**CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY**

Thursday, September 6

12:00 McManus Conference Room

(M252 Located near House Minority Offices)