

Psalm 23

Introduction

- Quote p. 124.
- Spurgeon called it “The pearl of the Psalms”
- This song is a masterpiece of inspired praise, testifying to the abundant grace and goodness of God to His people.
- The author is David.
 - 1 Samuel 16:7,11-13. Samuel anoints David, the shepherd, as King of Israel.
 - 1 Samuel 16:18. David, a warrior and musician.
 - Many of David’s psalms are full of complaints, but this is full of comforts, and the expressions of delight in God’s great goodness and dependence upon him.
- Shepherd. This psalm foreshadows the coming Savior! Remember that Jesus is all over the Old Testament.
 - Remember that Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd” in John 10:11. He describes his role as the good shepherd in John 10:1-18.
 - The difference between sheep and cattle. Cattle are driven from behind while sheep follow the shepherd’s voice. Several herds of sheep may be mixed up in one pen. When a shepherd calls only the sheep that belong to him will come out of the gate. The sheep know the shepherd’s voice.
 - In the desert like terrain of Israel, grass didn’t grow everywhere. The shepherd knew where the good pastureland was located and led the sheep there. Unless moved, sheep will keep eating the grass to the roots and destroy the pasture so must be continually moved.
 - Shepherds care for the physical condition of their sheep. Put oil on and dress wounds and sores caused by parasites and insect bites. Pick off insects and other parasites.
 - Shepherds would protect sheep from predators such as lions and wolves. Domestic sheep have little in the way of defense against such predators.
 - Shepherding was considered a very lowly job, with the shepherd often spending 24 hours a day with the sheep, sleeping outdoors in all kinds of weather.

The Good Shepherd

- V.1. David uses the metaphor of a shepherd to describe the relationship between the Lord and his people. It is a tender analogy that people of that time would have understood. It is a metaphor rich in meaning, indicating how deeply personal and close was his relationship with God.
- Left to themselves sheep are not able to care for themselves, to meet their needs, they are dependent on the shepherd. David declares that God has provided for all of his needs.
- V.2. Sheep are fearful animals, easily panicked and, when scared, will not lie down to rest. This speaks of the peace and true satisfaction that only God can provide for the sheep. In the dry desert like terrain of Israel the sheep needed the shepherd to guide them to green pastures.
- Also, in this dry climate the sheep need the shepherd to lead them to water. Tired thirsty sheep need the refreshment of water but they are instinctively afraid of

rushing water so the shepherd would often need to take a few large stones to partially dam up the water to form a pool of calm water.

- How are we like sheep?
- V.3. Restores or refreshes my soul. The Hebrew words suggest a stray sheep being brought back to the fold and could mean repentance. Spiritual or physical refreshment could both apply here.
- How often do you feel like you need to be refreshed?
- Guidance. Unlike other animals sheep lack a sense of direction and can become easily lost. They easily go astray and are prone to wandering. The shepherd must continually guide them. God guides us through his Word and the Spirit for his glory, his name's sake.
- V.4. The shepherd would lead his flock from one pasture to another, a move which would often involve passing through a narrow valley between high jagged cliffs often filled with potential danger such as wild animals. The sun would be obstructed from shining into the valley, creating darkness or a shadow. Such a valley could become a place of death for wandering sheep.
- David declares that even in danger and difficult circumstances he will not be afraid because the Lord is there as his guide and protector.
- Rod and staff. The rod was usually an oak club about two feet long, and was used to protect the sheep from predators. The staff was his crook, a long pole hooked at one end, it was used to pry sheep loose from thickets, to push branches aside, to pull fallen sheep out of holes, to lead them along narrow paths, and to drive off snakes. Such tools were sources of comfort for fearful sheep and for David.

The Gracious host

- V.5. Hospitality in the ancient near East was very important and required more than just providing a meal. The host was also responsible for protecting the guest. Hospitality was especially important for travelers as there were no Holiday Inns and there was always the danger from robbers. David sees the Lord as a gracious host, protecting him and providing his needs. The anointing could be for medical or cosmetic purposes, soothing dry skin and possibly sweet smelling. Of course, Samuel had anointed David as king as was the custom in those days.
- The overflowing cup represents the bountiful meeting of needs. The attentive host continues to fill the cup of the thirsty guest.
- V.6. David expresses his confidence in God's goodness and love always.

Summary

- This psalm with its vivid pictures and rich metaphors show us another picture of what God is like. Spend some time meditating on this psalm this week. Picture yourself as one of God's precious sheep. See yourself, after a long dry trek from one pasture to another, in a pasture of lush green grass. Imagine drinking clear, cool water. This is how God wants to provide for you.
- This psalm would be easy to memorize as it is so familiar. Recite it to yourself after a difficult day or when wrestling with a problem situation or when in need of comfort.

- Pray this psalm. Pray it for yourself or someone else. Anyone you know need comfort, guidance, provision, refreshment or protection?