

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Psalm 23,

We just finished 1 Timothy last week, and before we move on to our next book we are going to study, we will be spending the next couple of Sundays going through some of the Psalms.

So today we will be studying a psalm that is precious to many.

It is one of the most beloved passages in the entire bible.

It is also one of the most quoted.

Even before I became a Christian – I knew Psalm 23 – because I had seen it in book marks and heard it at funerals.

In fact, when my grandmother passed away, by God's grace – she had accepted the Lord as her personal savior about 6 months before she passed and had already made arrangements for when the time came.

And she bought a plot to be buried in a catholic cemetery not too far from where we lived.

So we went and met with a priest in the rectory, and he informed us that our pastor could not do the service – that we had to pay for a priest to do the service at the gravesite – so I asked if he would recite Psalm 23

There was a bible sitting on the coffee table in front of us – and he proceeds to look for the book of Psalms – and after trying to look for it in the NT, I told him that it was in the OT and found it for him.

Psalm 23 has been the source of comfort for many during times of trial and distress.

So it is a great privilege and blessing to be studying it this morning with each of you.

And I pray that the Holy Spirit make it even more a blessing to us today.

Let's pray...

Read Psalm 23 together -

I came across a quote recently,

*Accept what is,*

*Let go of what was,*

*And have faith in what will be,*

*God knows what He is doing. (repeat)*

There is nothing wrong with the quote.

This is a quote that many of us would want hanging on a picture frame on our walls in our homes or on the door of the fridge – being held in place by vegetable magnets.

Here is the thing church; there will come a day when each and every one of us will have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will have that rude awakening, the wakeup call from God that things may not continue to go as smoothly as they have been in the past.

Just because we gave our lives to Jesus Christ doesn't mean we automatically get a "get out of jail free card" – we will suffer tribulations, we will go through difficulties, we may unexpectedly suffer the loss of a loved one or we may get a diagnosis from the doctor that we have an incurable disease.

It is during these times that many of us will start to question where God is in all of this and begin to question God's will.

Does God really know what He is doing???

Because we serve a good God – He provides the answer in His word.

God not only knows what He is doing in our lives but He wants us to know what He is up to within our lives.

And He does this, not by giving each of us a step by step details of everything we are going to go through in life – God is not going to send an angel to knock on my door and say, "Herb – here is the flowchart that God prepared for your life – this is how you get from point A to point B and so on"

No church, He does this by providing to us a “job description” – not our “job description” - His own job description.

And when we understand His job description, then we know exactly what to expect and what not to expect from God as we walk through the valley of shadow of death.

**[Psa 23:1-6 NKJV] 1 A Psalm of David. The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want.**

I find it interesting that the Holy Spirit inspired King David to write – The Lord is my shepherd.

David could have easily written, The Lord is my Counselor / Advocate/ Attorney – because as you know,

**[1Jo 2:1 NKJV] 1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**

Every time we sin – satan goes before God and points out our sin.

And because God is holy – he reminds God that we are deserving of death.

But then our Advocate steps before the Judge, and together they agree that, because we are “in Christ,” no further punishment is necessary - Because Jesus has already made sufficient payment to redeem us.

So David could have used – the Lord is my Advocate.

The Holy Spirit inspired David to write God's job description as a Shepherd.

And the reason is because we have to remember that David, before God anointed him king to shepherd His people, was once himself a shepherd.

He knew what it meant to lead a flock and attend to their needs.

He knew the job description of a shepherd.

He knew that sheep were high maintenance creatures that had the propensity to get into a lot of trouble.

He knew that the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of shepherd they had.

If the shepherd cared for his sheep, the sheep would do well – they would be well tended, healthy and at peace.

If the shepherd was selfish and lazy, if the shepherd didn't care about his sheep, the sheep would suffer – their sheep would be scrawny and sick, full of parasites.

So David knew the difference between a good shepherd and a bad shepherd because he himself was once a good shepherd – and here in verse one, he assigns the job description of a good shepherd to the Lord.

And notice that David says, the Lord is **my** shepherd – he is personalizing it.

He is the one who watches over me, He is the one who cares for me, He is the one who preserves me.

Church, the thing about sheep is that they are not self-sufficient.

They need a shepherd.

So David here reveals his own need for a shepherd.

The Good Shepherd.

In the Sermon on the Mount –

Jesus says,

**[Mat 5:3 NKJV] 3 "Blessed [are] the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Who are the poor in spirit?

Those that need a shepherd.

And just like David, every believer can find great comfort in the idea that God can be a shepherd to them in a personal sense.

I like this quote from Charles Spurgeon –

“Before a man can truly say, “the LORD is my shepherd,” he must first feel himself to be a sheep by nature, “for he cannot know that God is his Shepherd unless he feels in

himself that he has the nature of a sheep.” He must relate to a sheep in its foolishness, its dependency, and in the warped nature of its will.

Jesus applies the picture of the Good Shepherd to Himself in John 10; He said .

**{John 10:14} “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.**

With even greater conviction than David, you and I can say, "Jesus is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Now, I asked you to make a note of I shall not want –

Because a better translation would be – “what more do I want”

If the Lord is my Shepherd – am I content with His provision and His care?

Am I content with how He is managing my life?

When He is our shepherd, we find contentment.

Church, contentment should be the hallmark of the man or woman who's put their life in the hand of God.

It is the believer proclaiming “I decide to not desire more than what the LORD, my shepherd gives.”

The only area in our life where we are allowed not to be content is in our relationship with Him – it is only here that we are to desire more.

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

Sheep are such skittish creatures, therefore it's impossible for them to lie down unless 4 conditions are met - and it's the responsibility of the Good Shepherd to make sure that they are.

Sheep will not lie down if they are in fear.

Sheep are so timid they are panicked by the slightest thing - anything unfamiliar will cause them to bolt - and one frightened sheep can disturb dozens more without the others ever knowing the cause.

The one thing that calms the flock, is the shepherd standing among them.

They know that it is the Shepherd's responsibility to protect them and defend them.

As they keep their eyes on the shepherd, their fears are calmed.

Church, we live in a world today with a tremendous anxiety and fear problem.

And I am pretty sure the events in 2020 have only made this problem worse.

The remedy to fear is to keep are eyes on Jesus – the Shepherd who has promised to defend us and protect us.

The second reason that sheep will not lie down is if there is friction between them.

Sheep have a pecking order - one sheep will assert its dominance over the others by butting them with the top of its head.

When there is rivalry among the sheep, tension upsets the entire flock but as soon as the shepherd begins to walk among the sheep, the rivalries end and each sheep realizes the shepherd is the undisputed leader and in light of his authority, they are all equals.

Once again, if we take our eyes off the Lord, envy and strife will occur in the church.

The third reason that sheep will not lie down is if they are infested with parasites – so they will only rest if they are not being bugged.

Therefore it is the shepherd's responsibility to keep an eye out for these pests and be ready to apply an ointment or a salve that will provide relief for the sheep.

I am pretty sure that some of us here this morning, are being bothered or bugged by all kinds of pesky little troubles.

Jesus knows what these troubles are and He knows that we cannot find rest until we get relief.

So, He applies the oil of the Holy Spirit to calm us and smooth away the irritation of living in a fallen world.

The fourth condition that a sheep will not lie down is if it is hungry.

Israel is mostly desert – so it was the responsibility of the shepherd to make sure to find places where his sheep would be able to pasture.

And because many grasses are seasonal, he had to plan accordingly.

They might eat this type of grass during the spring and this type during the fall.

Not only was it his responsibility to lead them to a place to pasture, it was his responsibility to make sure that they didn't eat too much – sheep are dumb animals, one of the things that they do is that they will continue to eat the grass going all the way down to the root.

So the shepherd had to keep moving them along so that the pastures would not be destroyed.

In the same way - the Lord knows precisely the spiritual diet we need to make us grow, and He leads us through life, taking us to those pastures that are going to provide us just what we need.

And as He ministers to our needs, we find rest.

We also find in verse two that it is the job requirement of the Shepherd to lead the sheep to still waters.

It is a known fact that sheep are incapable of finding good water on their own.

In fact, if left alone, sheep will drink whatever water they stumble upon, even if it is stagnant, filthy and unfit to drink.

And because sheep are skittish, many refuse to drink from a moving river.

So one of the things that the Good Shepherd does is that he gets them up early in the morning so that they can eat while the grass is heavy with the morning dew.

So that way, as they eat – they also drink.

And it is this morning's grazing that provides the nourishment that they will need for the day.

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

The word that is used here for restores – is the word to bring back or to repair, to refresh.

If a sheep rolls over on its back – it has a big problem.

It won't be able to get back up on its own.

And this is very common with pregnant or overweight sheep – as their center of gravity has now shifted.

This is known as a cast sheep.

So the sheep will be laying their on its back swinging its legs helplessly in the air.

If the shepherd doesn't spot it and flip the sheep over, the sheep will become an easy meal for a wolf or it may even die within a few hours as the gases in its stomach begin to expand cutting off circulation and pressing against the other organs.

This is why a shepherd is forever counting his sheep - if he comes up short, his first thought is that there is a cast sheep somewhere - and he sets out to find it.

Now, when he finds it, he sets it back on its feet and because the legs are numb, he will straddle it and rub the legs to get the circulation going again – and as he does this, he is calmly speaking to the sheep to calm it from its panic.

The Shepherd's voice is the most calming thing in a sheep's life.

All of this is conveyed in the phrase, "He restores my soul."

Church, when we fall – our Good Shepherd doesn't want to leave us there lying in our backs – He wants to flip us over. He wants to restore us.

In Luke 15,

Jesus tells us the parable of the lost sheep.

He says the shepherd had one hundred sheep and one got lost.

The shepherd leaves the 99 to go after the one.

What happened when the shepherd found the one.

Did he beat it and kick it for running away and getting lost?

No – he rejoiced and called the other shepherds together to celebrate.

**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.**

During the summer months – the shepherds would take the sheep up to the mountain tops where there was still grass and mountain springs that the sheep would be able to graze on.

As the shepherd guided his flock from one pasture to the next or from one mountain top to the next, there were some territories that were more dangerous than others.

But the sheep's safety always lay in staying close to the shepherd.

Note those words – you are with me.

Turn with me to Isaiah 43

**[Isa 43:1-2 NKJV] 1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called [you] by your name; You [are] Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I [will be] with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.**

We see a perfect example of this in the life of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Nebuchadnezzar had the three of them thrown into the fiery furnace and when he looks inside, he sees four people –

They were not alone.

Jesus, The Good Shepherd was with them.

Church, we don't have to be afraid of the valleys – we can walk through them knowing that He is there walking alongside us.

The shepherd had two tools he would take with him as he led the sheep.

His rod and his staff

The rod was used both for discipline and correction. If a sheep was starting to go astray, to eat something poisonous, or do something stupid, it would get a whack with the rod to put it back in line.

The rod was also used to beat off predators. When David said he'd fought a lion and a bear, it would have been with his rod.

The staff was a long stick that served as something a shepherd could lean on while traveling, but also as a way of directing the sheep. It usually had a curved crook at one end that the shepherd used to pull or direct sheep.

The rod speaks of protection, the staff of guidance

When the flock sees the rod and the staff together in the shepherd's hand, they know they are safe and secure

For the believer, the rod and staff of the Lord are His Word

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

In verses 5 & 6, David shifts the picture from God as Shepherd to Generous Host  
And here in verse 5, we see a parallel to what we see earlier in verse 2 – where it said, He makes me to lie down in green pastures

David's peace in God is so great, that even though he lives in the midst of those who would like nothing more than to kill him, he can sit down and eat a good meal without concern.

Think about hard that would be to do?

But because of God's gracious provision, David was at peace, even in the midst of his enemies!

Regarding the second part of verse 5 –

Back them people didn't shower.

So people would be stinky and smelly.

So when someone showed up to one's home, the good host would open up the flask of perfumed oil and pour it over the head of the guest.

The idea here parallels the Lord restoring our soul –

He pours the sweet oil of joy onto the stinky problems and smelly attitudes we can develop by just living daily life in a fallen world.

The idea of the cup running over is in regard to the blessings that the Good host provides to those that come to Him and dine with Him

God blesses us abundantly.

He is not stingy with His blessings.

Those that are discontent – one of the reasons that they are discontent is because they keep on looking at the cups of others instead of focusing on their own cup that is overflowing with blessings.

**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.**

No matter what the circumstances, no matter what the cause, if we are pursuing God's will for our lives, His mercy will follow us all the days of our lives so when we do fall, it will hold us up!

David was convinced of God's grace.

And the Lord, our Good Shepherd, our Good Host, wants you and I to be as well.

Amen

Let's pray...

