

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 6.9.2024

PSALM 23 - THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

I. INTRODUCTION

Psalm 23:1-6

1 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.

II. YAHWEH MY SHEPHERD

- Psalm 23 is a psalm of thanksgiving attributed to David.
 - As to the occasion for the psalm, there isn't likely one event that is in view.
 - David's life was filled with crises and loss, trials and tears, and this psalm reflects any one of those.
 - Yet, in spite of all his hardship and suffering, this psalm exudes confident trust in the Lord to see him through everything.
- "The Lord, Yahweh, is MY shepherd."
 - Yahweh IS God's covenant name that he personally disclosed to Moses in Exodus 3.
 - He is the inexhaustible God, "I am who I am." (Ex. 3:14-15)
 - That God is confessed to be David's personal shepherd.
 - David has used other terms and metaphors to refer to the Lord—deliverer, stronghold, refuge, king, rock, shield, and fortress.
 - But shepherd is an intimate metaphor for the Lord. It's the only psalm that teaches us to call the Lord "my shepherd."
- "Shepherd" was a rich and complex idea in Israel's culture and in that of the surrounding nations.
 - Israel would be intimately familiar with the shepherd's vocation. David was a shepherd. All of the patriarchs were shepherds, as was Moses.
 - But the notion of being a shepherd of people comes from a tradition that is far broader than taking care of sheep.
 - In the Ancient Near East, kings, leaders, and even gods were ascribed the title of shepherd as a designation of their relation to the people they ruled over.
 - In Scripture, the Lord is the Shepherd of Israel, his flock. (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 95:7; Jer. 31:10; Micah 7:14)
 - The kings of Israel were judged as shepherds in Jeremiah's prophetic warning, "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord (Jer. 23:1).
 - Micah prophesied that the coming Messiah "shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord" (Micah 5:4).
 - The title had special associations with the Lord's leading and protecting in the wilderness, "you led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (Ps 78:20)."
 - To say, "the Lord is my shepherd" invokes all of the richness of this background as well as that of the pastoral vocation of shepherd.
- David's confession is pregnant with commitment, confidence and trust in Yahweh's shepherding over his life.
 - "He is not just Israel's shepherd, He is MY shepherd."
- This is one of the reasons it is so easy to personalize this psalm.
 - We can take David's words on our lips and express gratitude and confidence that God's covenantal love is demonstrated to us individually as well as corporately.
 - Because he is "our shepherd" communally, we can each confess that the Lord is also "my personal shepherd."
 - The great and glorious God of the universe has revealed himself as our shepherd, stooping down to care for his people, like a shepherd takes care of his sheep.
 - Have you marveled at this truth? (Psalm 8:4)
 - Yahweh has chosen to be our shepherd!

III. THE SHEPHERD'S PROVISION

- V1b I shall not want.

- David is saying, because the Lord is MY shepherd, I lack nothing.
- What we know of sheep is that they are not animals that can be left to their own. They are truly helpless animals.
- What do shepherdless sheep lack?—Everything necessary for their survival!
- David is confident that the Lord will meet his needs.
- Ps 34:10b but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.
- This is how Moses described God's care for Israel in the wilderness.
- Deut 2:7 For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows you're going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing."
- What is it that those in Yahweh's shepherding care will not lack?
- Vv2-6 are the answer to that question.
- Notice it is the Lord doing all of the verbal actions in vv2-4, with David doing the action in v5.

1. REST

- V2a He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- Lying down means rest. A good shepherd will see to it that his sheep receive rest when they need it.
- Phillip Keller, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23."
- He writes that sheep are restless creatures and do not lie down easily.
- There are four basic things that keep sheep from rest: fear, friction, flies, famine.
- Only the shepherd can provide the trust, peace, deliverance, and pasture that is needed for the sheep to experience rest.

2. FOOD

- V2a He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- A good shepherd gives his sheep rest in green pastures. That means provision of food.
- In the wilderness, green pastures are few and far between. You will only find small tufts of green grass among the rocky and arid terrain.
- The shepherd leads his sheep to a hillside that has some green pasture. The sheep can graze and rest when they are fed and have had their fill and then they can lie down and rest.
- They've eaten, they're satisfied, and can rest.
- David experienced the Lord's provision in the tough conditions of the wilderness.

3. WATER

- V2b He leads me beside still waters.
- A shepherd leads his sheep. They walk ahead of the flock and the sheep follow.
- He leads them to still waters, or restful waters.

4. LIFE

- V3a He restores my soul.
- The shepherd's care and provision leads to life and vitality for the sheep.
- A sheep cannot find rest, food or water for themselves in the wilderness, they need the shepherd to lead them to the sources of life and rest.
- Keller in his book explains what happens to sheep who are cast down and only the shepherd can restore the sheep to health.

- David recognized that it was the Lord giving him life in the midst of his hardships.

5. GUIDANCE

- V3b He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- “Righteousness” means “right,”
- I Only the shepherd can lead his flock on the right paths to green pastures and still waters.
- Sheep are dumb creatures. They can easily wander off into barren lands and dangerous territory.
- Only the shepherd can guide them in the right way.
- David acknowledged the Lord’s leading him through his trials and keeping him on the right paths.
- David also recognized that the Lord did this for “his name’s sake.”
- Yahweh’s reputation was at stake.
- He made a covenant with Israel and promised to protect and provide for them.
- Yahweh would be faithful to keep him on the right path, preserving his holy reputation.

6. PRESENCE

- V4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
- The high canyon walls cast deep, dark shadows into the valleys where the shepherd would lead his sheep during the winter.
- The valleys were certainly fearful places for the sheep.
- But what kept the flock from giving in to their natural fear was the presence of the shepherd.
- The “valley of the shadow of death” is as much the right path as the high pastures and still waters.
- David’s life wasn’t all mountaintop experiences, yet he was conscious of the nearness of God as he walked through those valleys.
- Notice the pronoun shifted from “he” to “you.” “You are with me.”
- David did not need to fear because Yahweh’s presence was with him as he passed through life’s valleys.

7. COMFORT

- V4b your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- Shepherds carried two implements with them, a rod or a club to fend and fight off wild animals, and a staff, the shepherd’s crook, to prod the sheep if needed.
- The sheep would be protected if a wild animal approached.
- It is comforting for the flock to know the shepherd will deploy the rod in protection of his sheep.
- And the fact that the shepherd carried his staff, encouraged the sheep to keep walking in the right paths away from danger.
- David was comforted in the knowledge of the Lord’s protection and loving discipline even though he may have been surrounded by hostile enemies in the valley.
- David speaks poetically of how the Lord provides everything we need for life and safety.
- He provides his presence and direction—doing all for his name’s sake.

THE LORD OUR HOST

- Now in v5 the metaphor shifts from the Lord as shepherd to the Lord as host.

- V5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- The image may be of a feast in the field of battle in which his enemies have been defeated.
- Yahweh has set a table before David in the presence of his enemies.
- It is an image of vindication, David's enemies have been put to shame.
- In the culture of the time, the relationship between a host and guest was personal and intimate.
- A good host protects his guests from enemies who mean to do harm to his guests. (i.e., Lot)
- A good host would protect his guests at all costs.
- A good host would provide abundant food for his guests.
- A good host would anoint the heads of his guests with oil. Recall Jesus's complaint when he was a guest of a Pharisee in Luke 7, "You did not anoint my head with oil." The Pharisee had disrespected Jesus, his guest. That Pharisee was a bad host.
- A good host would provide plenty of wine. "My cup overflows."
- The point of this imagery is David sees God as the most gracious and extravagant of hosts.
- The Lord, as a host, has vast resources upon which to draw. And David is comforted by that fact.
- "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." There is no lack with the Lord as your host.

THE LORD'S PURSUIT

- David started the psalm with the Lord leading him, at the very center of the psalm he exclaims that the Lord is with him, and now he concludes the psalm by declaring that the Lord follows him.
- V6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- "Follow me" is the Hebrew word "to pursue."
- Instead of his enemy's pursuing him, The Lord's goodness and steadfast love pursue David.
- And with God as his host, his stay is not temporary, he will dwell in God's tent forever.
- David will have continual fellowship with God all the days of his life, with God's goodness and loving kindness chasing hard after him.

IV. THE GOOD SHEPHERD

- The powerful aspect of this psalm is how it is appropriated by Christ, the greater David.
- God the Father shepherded Jesus throughout his life, he was with him in the valley of the shadow of death, and he shepherded him all the way to glory.
- But we also see something so amazing in Jesus.
- Yahweh, the good shepherd of Psalm 23, became incarnate in Jesus.
- John 1:14 The word became flesh and dwelt among us.
- In John 10, Jesus said that he is the Good Shepherd, and his sheep hear his voice, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
- He is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.
- Everything David said of Yahweh's provision as his shepherd, can be said of Jesus the Good Shepherd and his provision for his sheep.
- Rest - The Christian life begins and continues by resting in Christ.
- He said, "Come to me, all you who labor, who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28). In him we find rest for our souls.

- Food - Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)
- In Christ, we are spiritually nourished as we feast upon him. And he truly satisfies the hunger of our souls.
- Water - Jesus gives us living water to drink of which we will never thirst again. He leads us to the still water that will spring up to eternal life. (John 4:14)
- Life - We are like cast off sheep. We were spiritually dead, rolled on our back, helpless in our sinful state.
- And Jesus restores us to life by laying his life down for his sheep.
- John 10:10 I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
- Guidance - Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;
- We are prone to wander but Jesus the Good Shepherd, leads us in righteous paths.
- John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth,
- Presence - Jesus will protect his flock from any and all enemies.
- Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has promised, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:29)
- John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.
- Comfort - what comfort we have in our assurance of our Lord's salvation, protection, and preservation.
- John 10:28-29 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
- Like the gracious host of Psalm 23, the Lord protected us at the cost of his own Son.
- He gave his only Son to ransom his lost sheep.
- And like the gracious host, he lavishly provides everything we need for life and godliness.
- The OT saints could only envision dwelling in the house of the Lord throughout the days of their earthly life.
- But we, who are in Christ, are assured that through the work of our Good Shepherd, our eternal dwelling place is secured.
- Can you confess the Lord as your shepherd?
- Are you comforted by God's loving presence, provision, protection, and care over your life?
- In John's heavenly vision, he sees the saints of God in their eternal dwelling place, with the Lamb as their shepherd, guiding them and caring for them.
- Rev 7:15-17 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
- And Paul encourages all Christians with these words.

- Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Why is this true? Because we are being chased by the goodness and loving kindness of our Good Shepherd all the days of our life and on into eternity.
- All for his name's sake and his glory alone.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?