

Text: Psalm 23

Title: A Sheep's Testimony

Intro: VBS this week—we would be remiss to not explore this passage having spent this week immersed in it.

- Psalm 23 is a well-known Psalm and the favorite of many Christians
- A psalm of David—who was a shepherd as a boy, and God chose him to be king over Israel
- Brought comfort to more people than we could count
- Simple yet profound psalm
- Psalm 23 reflects God's tender care for His people
- The land of Israel was full of sheep and shepherds

'shepherds'—a term that spoke of care, feeding, and protection.

Shepherding sheep was not an easy job

Shepherds: a shepherd has 'his own sheep'—he knows his own sheep

- A shepherd not only has the right to lead and feed his sheep, he has the responsibility to do so
- At night, the sheep would come into the village fold—every shepherd would bring his sheep and join them together with other sheep in the same fold
- In the morning, the shepherd would come and call his own sheep and call them by name. He knows his own sheep.
- The sheep know the shepherd's voice and they follow him
- The sheep will not follow a stranger/a stranger's voice

At night, thieves would often come and try to steal sheep from the fold—so, a guard had to be set to protect them from intruders.

- Some would try to climb over the wall and fleece the sheep (steal their wool) or slaughter them (for food).
- A guard was absolutely necessary for the protection of the sheep.
- So, the shepherd was committed to protect the sheep at night, and then call them out by name, and lead them to green pastures and still waters.
- We call that 'animal husbandry'—the tender care of an animal (that's what Pastor Rob does with his farm animals (pigs and chickens—he provides a safe space for them to sleep/rest and healthy food and water).
- A shepherd always 'leads' his sheep—he goes before them and calls them by name
- At night, as the sheep are coming in, the shepherd would drop his rod in the doorway in order to check each of his sheep for any kind of wound or problem—and then let them into the fold
 - They had to pass by him into his care
 - In the morning, he would call them by name and they would pass again into his care
- For a true shepherd (not a hireling), one who owns the sheep, shepherding was more than a job, it was his entire life.

Jesus said in John 10:14—"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,"

John 10:11—"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

1 Peter 2:25—Peter calls Jesus the 'Shepherd and Guardian of your souls'

When David says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"—what does he mean???

David says his relationship to the Lord is like a sheep to his shepherd.

- That means, he is not lacking in any necessity—not lacking rest, guidance, or safety
- The emphasis is upon 'my shepherd'—Lit 'the shepherd of me'
- A shepherd's work in ancient Israel was considered the lowest of all work.
- A shepherd would actually live with the sheep 24/7 with unwavering devotion—day and night, day-after-day, week-after-week, in bad weather and good weather, to nurture, guide, and protect the sheep.
- The shepherd would assume full responsibility for the needs and safety of his flock—even risking his own life for their protection.
- This is what God has chosen to be to His people—He is our 'everything' and constant protector/provider

Sheep are mostly defenseless animals. They cannot protect themselves. Sheep are completely dependent upon a shepherd—for everything—and the shepherd abundantly supplied everything the sheep needed

- Because of God's greatness and His constant, loving care over His flock, David concluded, 'I shall not be in want'

The point: God is the all-sufficient, inexhaustible, and unchanging Shepherd over His sheep—(those who belong to Him).

- When the Lord is 'our Shepherd' we lack nothing that is good and necessary for living and enjoying life to the fullest.
- David could have used a different term/a different analogy—"the Lord is my King"
 - 'the Lord is my deliverer'
 - 'the Lord is my rock'
 - 'the Lord is my provider'
- "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"
- In other wds, "The Lord is the center of David's life"—everything in his life flows from the relationship he has with the Lord, the Creator God.
- Because David's faith was in the Lord, he could face with confidence whatever came his way, knowing that God was present with him.
- David knew that whatever he needed would be provided by the Lord, his Shepherd

23:2—"He makes me lie down in green pastures;"—the picture is a robust field full of lush grass where the sheep can eat and lie down to rest having filled their stomachs with good food

- These pastures are as good to eat as they are to look at
- 'green pastures'—were a seasonal wonder—the fields in Israel and even parts of the desert would turn green during the winter and spring

- In the summer and fall, the shepherd would need to search for food for the sheep to eat
- A good shepherd would never lead the sheep to fields that are withered and dry
- To 'lie down in green pastures'—is a picture of rest—in other wds, the sheep have time to eat and then rest
- Sheep are fearful animals and will not lie down and rest if they are scared
- What we learn is: God not only supplies our needs, He abundantly supplies—God is never stingy in giving whatever we need

“...He leads me beside quiet waters.”—‘quiet waters’—are the wells and springs where the sheep can drink and rest and not be rushed—the idea is: ‘pools of fresh water’

- Waters that make noise tend to frighten sheep
- Sheep will not tolerate a rushing river where they could be swept away in the current
- Often, shepherds would take rocks and dam off a section of running water in order to make a still pool where the sheep would not be startled
- The picture is God’s refreshing care for His own people
- As a faithful shepherd provides his sheep with rest, lush pastures, and quiet waters, so the Lord takes care of His people in a careful and abundant way
- Life can seem weary at times—but God promises to refresh us in the ways that we need when we lean upon Him

23:3—“He restores my soul;”—‘soul’ here refers to all of David’s life

- God refreshes our soul whenever it is needed—our Shepherd will lead us there
- To ‘restore’ means to ‘turn back’ to ‘reset a broken bone’ to ‘return a sheep that wanders from the fold’
- The shepherd of sheep would care for injured sheep and brings them back to safe places
- When the Lord is our shepherd, when we wander away from Him, from His Word, from His commands, He graciously and gently brings us back and makes us useful again

“...He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.”—the image is a shepherd who leads his sheep to right paths

- ‘paths’—refer to ‘well-worn paths’—safe paths, paths that teach us obedience, paths that lead to safety and blessing
- God leads His sheep in ways of living that keep them from spiritual danger
- At times, we may think that wandering away from God’s commands might be better—might be ‘more fulfilling’
- Yet, David says that God leads us to paths of righteousness, and the reason is because of His name and righteous character
- The idea is: if the Lord is our shepherd, and whenever we try to wander off, God will pursue us
- We can never escape the shepherd’s care

23:4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

- Another important responsibility the shepherd had was to lead the sheep from one grazing place to another.

- Often, such a move involved passing through a narrow valley between high jagged cliffs.
- Within those cliffs were shadowy places where wild animals could hide and ambush the sheep.
- Such a shadowy place would be considered in that day a 'shadow of death' because you have no idea what dangers that could be lurking in those places
- For a sheep, walking through a deep, dark valley was a frightening thing—danger is lurking, a time of great vulnerability
 - The temptation is to fear
 - The temptation is to resort to our own ability and not trust the shepherd

Even though I walk...—David says, 'There are times that it is necessary to pass through these places and sometimes it seems easier to doubt that the shepherd really cares for us.

- David is saying: 'When he is tempted to doubt the shepherd's care and protection, he must remind himself of the truth—that the Lord is his Shepherd.
 - He has to 'tune his heart' to the truth that God has not left him nor abandoned him but goes with him.
- Christians are never insulated from the presence of very real dangers—being a believer doesn't mean we never suffer hostility or persecution or dangerous situations
- David says that the shepherd's path sometimes leads us through 'dark valleys'—it's not always 'green pastures' and 'still waters'
 - Life is not always an easy road to travel
- Christians are not immune to fear in certain circumstances
 - We live in scary times among some scary people
 - Uncertainty in so many areas—wars, threats of war, persecution, moral decline of society, how do I raise a family in the midst of a corrupt society???
- How does David respond??? He looks to the Shepherd of his soul.

Notice: 'I fear no evil for You are with me.'—David doesn't say 'He' is with me, but 'You' are with me.

- In other wds, David is speaking to the Lord his shepherd who is right there, ready to protect, ready to guide, ready to restore.
- It's like a child that gets frightened and runs to the safety of his parents—sometimes grabbing their leg
- David runs to the Lord and reminds himself that he is not alone.

Notice: 'Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.'—the rod and staff were tools of a shepherd's trade—and they were constant reminders of God's presence to guide and protect

- The rod was usually an oak club about two feet long and was used for discipline and protection against wild animals.
- The staff was used for guidance/direction/rescue for danger—to pull fallen sheep out of holes and lead them along narrow paths.
- David feels safe behind the shepherd of his soul—he is comforted knowing that the Lord (YHWH) is strong and mighty enough to deal with any obstacle or opponent he might have.

Notice: The text doesn't say that David was never afraid, but that he 'feared no evil'—he was willing to go wherever the Good Shepherd led him

- We don't have to live in fear of evil when the Lord is our shepherd

Notice: 23:5—"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows."—this the image of God's lavish supply—His abundance

- 'You'—David is still speaking to the Lord God
- This is a feast of resources for our heart
- God may lead us by dangerous valleys, but He is never stingy in His provision
- God sets out a feast to eat and drink at our time of great need

'You prepare a table...in the presence of my enemies'—Did David have enemies??? Why???

- As God's sheep, we will always have enemies—those who hate us because they hate God and they hate the Truth
- The picture is: 'our enemies must watch quietly and unable to harm us while God blesses us abundantly'
- God's care cannot and will not be stooped by enemies of God—enemies of the Truth
- God provides whatever we need in any and every situation and our enemies cannot stop God's hand

Anointing with oil: Anointing was an ancient custom practiced by the Egyptians and afterward by the Greeks and Romans and other nations.

- Olive oil was used, either pure or mixed with fragrant and costly spices, often brought from a long distance.¹
- The biblical imagery of oil and wine is always a sign of prosperity and blessing
- Psalm 92:10—"But You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil."

In a dry climate, oil was the sign of thoughtfulness

- Kings and rulers were anointed with oil
- It was customary in those days to receive a guest by anointing him with fragrant perfume and with a cup filled with a choice wine.
- In this way, the host indicated that nothing was to be considered too good for his guest.
- David declares that God's care surpasses even this.
- His head had been anointed, and his cup was overflowing.²

'My cup overflows'—the idea is an abundant supply—an overwhelming supply in every season of life

- God has infinite resources in even the worst circumstances we can find ourselves in
- The idea is these are present now and will be into the future.
- We should never doubt the care of our shepherd.

¹ James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 313.

² Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Psalms*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 51.

- We must come back to these verses and remind ourselves of what we know to be true of our great shepherd.

23:6—"Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

- David draws a personal conclusion based upon everything he has just said

'Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me'—Lit 'pursue me'—it is not a passive kind of action but very aggressive

- God's goodness and steadfast love aggressively pursue His people—like a dog that hunts down a wild hog—(Illustrate: in South Florida—wild hog hunting with dogs)
- David had enemies that aggressively pursued him to harm him
- But now, David says, the Good Shepherd is aggressively pursuing David with blessing
- Have you ever been chased by a dog? A rooster? A turkey?
- God's blessings were 'chasing' David

'goodness'—that which is intrinsically good—the picture is a life filled with God's blessings—even God's trials He brings into our life are good—God gives us the grace we need for every difficulty we might face

'lovingkindness'—sometimes translated 'mercy'

- Both terms are used throughout the Hebrew Bible to describe God's condescending love for His chosen people

These blessings don't just happen 'on their own'—this is not 'random chance blessings'

- David need not fear, because God's care will always show itself in His providential and sovereign care—His provisions, abundance, and protection.
- God's loving care follows David throughout life.
- The psalmist does not say that our cup shall always be full or that our heads will always be anointed with oil, but we do have the promise that God's beneficence will be our lifelong companion³
- Rom 8:38-39—"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

'And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.'—the 'house of the Lord' is the place where God lives—God's presence

Everything that David has said about the Good Shepherd, he believes is true—and as he looks at his life, he has confidence/security knowing that he will forever be with the Lord in His presence

³ Willem A. VanGemeren, "[Psalms](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 218.

- When David looks at his circumstances and enemies he must face—he knows that the Creator God will take care of him
- When we face trouble and we don't immediately see God's hand in something or His immediate rescue, our tendency is to doubt God, to doubt His plan, to doubt God's wisdom, to doubt God's care, to not trust God for a good result.
- We must remind ourselves that the Lord is our Shepherd—that He is with us even in the darkest of circumstances
- The blessings that David experienced in this lifetime are but a sample of what he will experience forever with God in His heaven.

Notice: that the source of David's blessings—the blessings God poured out on his life were not dependent upon David's situation—his health, his financial status, his ability, his location.

- It was not the place or the circumstances but the relationship that David had with the Shepherd that transformed his life
- Everywhere David went, God was with him.
- In every trial, God was near to David.
- When enemies pursued David, God's hand was still upon him to bless him.
- So, it doesn't matter where we are or what our circumstances may be—if the Lord is the One shepherding you

Is the Lord God your shepherd???

Ask yourself:

Do I trust the Lord for all my material and spiritual needs???

Do I seek God's guidance so that I walk in 'paths of righteousness'???

In what ways have I experienced God's guiding hand in my life???