

PSALM 23

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT.
² HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES: HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.
³ HE RESTORETH MY SOUL: HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE.
⁴ 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.
⁵ THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES: THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP RUNNETH OVER.
⁶ SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE: AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER.

JOHN 10:11-18

¹¹"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP. ¹²THE HIRED HAND IS NOT THE SHEPHERD AND DOES NOT OWN THE SHEEP. SO WHEN HE SEES THE WOLF COMING, HE ABANDONS THE SHEEP AND RUNS AWAY. THEN THE WOLF ATTACKS THE FLOCK AND SCATTERS IT. ¹³THE MAN RUNS AWAY BECAUSE HE IS A HIRED HAND AND CARES NOTHING FOR THE SHEEP. ¹⁴"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD; I KNOW MY SHEEP AND MY SHEEP KNOW ME-
¹⁵JUST AS THE FATHER KNOWS ME AND I KNOW THE FATHER- AND I LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR THE SHEEP. ¹⁶I HAVE OTHER SHEEP THAT ARE NOT OF THIS SHEEP PEN. I MUST BRING THEM ALSO. THEY TOO WILL LISTEN TO MY VOICE, AND THERE SHALL BE ONE FLOCK AND ONE SHEPHERD. ¹⁷THE REASON MY FATHER LOVES ME IS THAT I LAY DOWN MY LIFE- ONLY TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN. ¹⁸NO ONE TAKES IT FROM ME, BUT I LAY IT DOWN OF MY OWN ACCORD. I HAVE AUTHORITY TO LAY IT DOWN AND AUTHORITY TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN. THIS COMMAND I RECEIVED FROM MY FATHER."

THERE WAS A YOUNG BOY WHO WANTED TO BE A COWBOY WHEN HE GREW UP.

SO AFTER BEING SHOWN A PICTURE OF JESUS WITH A LAMB AND HIS SHEPHERD'S HOOK, AND HEARING JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD, THE BOY WONDERED WHY?

SPECIFICALLY, HE ASKED WHY JESUS WAS A SHEPHERD INSTEAD OF A COWBOY, SINCE FROM THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE A BEING A COWBOY WAS MORE EXCITING.

HIS SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER RESPONDED BY ASKING THE BOY-"HOW DO COWBOYS MOVE THE CATTLE?"

THE LAD REPLIED THEY RIDE HORSES AND DRIVE THEM FROM BEHIND.

THE TEACHER THEN EXPLAINED SHEPHERDS DO NOT DRIVE THE SHEEP THEY LEAD THEM, WHICH IS WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US.

JESUS LEADS AND WE FOLLOW, THIS IS THE IMAGE HE CONVEYED WHEN HE CALLED HIMSELF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

THAT IMAGE WAS NOTHING NEW TO THOSE AROUND JESUS. THEY HAD BOTH REAL LIFE EXAMPLES THEY COULD SEE. AND SCRIPTURE ALSO REMINDED THEM ABOUT THE ROLE OF SHEPHERDS.

THE MOST NOTABLE OF ALL BIBLICAL PASSAGES CONCERNING SHEPHERDS AND SHEEP IS PSALM 23.

THIS MOST FAMOUS OF ALL THE PSALMS IS A PRAYER WRITTEN BY KING DAVID, WHO WAS ONCE A SHEPHERD HIMSELF.

COUNTLESS POEMS, SERMONS, AND DEVOTIONS HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY THIS ONE SHORT TEXT, WHICH MAKES IT A CHALLENGING ONE TO PREACH ON.

THE FOCUS OF MANY REFLECTIONS OF THE 23RD PSALM IS ON HOW THE SHEEP ARE BLESSED BY THE SHEPHERD.

HOWEVER, IF WE THINK ABOUT IT, THE MAIN FOCUS IS ON THE SHEPHERD - THAT IS ON GOD.

THEREFORE IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO LOOK AT THE PSALM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SHEPHERD AS WELL AS THE SHEEP.

AND YET IT IS NOT DAVID'S VIEW THAT WE SHOULD SEEK, BUT RATHER, LET US VIEW THE PSALM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

DOING SO WILL GIVE US INSIGHT INTO THE SAVIOR'S EXPERIENCE, AS WELL AS OUR OWN NEED TO FOLLOW HIM.

PSALM 23 IS A PSALM JESUS WOULD HAVE RECITED, AND INDEED HE PROBABLY PRAYED OFTEN.

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT." – IF ANYONE EVER FELT THE TRUTH AND POWER OF THIS DECLARATION DEEP DOWN IN HEART, MIND, AND SOUL, IT WAS JESUS.

NO HUMAN BEING, NOT EVEN ADAM AND EVE BEFORE THEY SINNED HAD SO INTIMATE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS DID JESUS.

INDEED NO RELATIONSHIP IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH IS AS CLOSE AS THAT OF GOD THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

JESUS NOT ONLY PRAYED PSALM 23 HE LIVED IT. HE EXPERIENCED THE PROVISION AND ASSURANCE OF THE PSALM IN A WAY NO ONE ELSE, NOT EVEN ITS AUTHOR DAVID, COULD.

THE FIRST THING OF NOTE IN THE PSALM, WHICH ALSO IS SIMILAR TO THE WORDS OF JESUS IN JOHN 10, IS THE PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE AND INTERACTION BETWEEN THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP.

INDEED GOD THE FATHER AND THE SON WERE BOUND BY A LOVE THAT ENFOLDED JESUS ALWAYS IN HIS FATHER'S CARE.

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD, WAS ONCE ALSO A SHEEP WHO TRUSTED GOD, HIS SHEPHERD, TO LEAD HIM.

JESUS FOLLOWED THE WILL OF HIS FATHER AS HE OFTEN TOLD OTHERS:

"I HAVE COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN NOT TO DO MY WILL BUT THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME." (JOHN 6:38)

THIS MEANS JESUS ALLOWED THE LORD HIS SHEPHERD TO LEAD HIM, AT TIMES EVEN WHERE JESUS DID NOT REALLY WANT TO GO.

AND YET JESUS FOUND REST AND REFRESHMENT, LOVE AND SATISFACTION IN THE CARE OF HIS FATHER.

AS IT SAYS IN THE PSALM: "HE MAKES ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES, HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS, HE RESTORES MY SOUL"

YES, THE FATHER PROVIDED FOR THE SON. FOR EXAMPLE: AFTER HE BEGAN HIS MINISTRY-JESUS WAS DEPENDENT UPON OTHERS FOR FOOD AND SHELTER AND OTHER NEEDS.

THE SAVIOR SET OUT ON HIS MISSION TRUSTING HIS FATHER TO PROVIDE WHAT HE NEEDED NOT JUST PHYSICALLY, BUT EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY.

REMEMBER JESUS OFTEN WENT APART TO PRAY, SO HE COULD RECEIVE ALL HIS FATHER SOUGHT TO PROVIDE.

THE PSALM EXPLAINS IT THIS WAY: "HE LEADS ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE."

INDEED, GOD LED JESUS ALWAYS IN THE RIGHT PATHS, ALONG THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT ALL JESUS SAID AND DID GLORIFIED THE NAME OF GOD.

JESUS KNEW THE POWER OF HIS FATHER'S CARE: "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 STAFF COMFORT ME."

IT WAS UNDER THE CARE AND GUIDANCE OF THE GREAT SHEPHERD JESUS WALKED THROUGH THE DARK VALLEY OF SUFFERING, AND THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

AND WHILE HIS PRAYER IN GETHSEMANE REVEALS JESUS FEARED BEING CRUCIFIED, HE DID NOT FEAR EVIL.

NOT EVEN DURING HIS TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS DID JESUS FEAR SATAN, NOR WAS HE THEN OR EVER, DECEIVED BY HIM, OR BY EVIL WITHIN OTHER PEOPLE.

JESUS HAD NO FEAR BECAUSE HE KNEW HE WAS IN HIS FATHER'S CARE ALWAYS, AND HAD THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN HIM.

THUS HE COULD CONFIDENTLY PRAY: "YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES."

YES, JESUS SAT AT TABLE MORE THAN ONCE WITH THOSE WHO WERE AGAINST HIM, LIKE SOME RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

AND THE LAST TIME HE SHARED A MEAL WITH ENEMIES WAS AT THE LAST SUPPER WITH JUDAS, HIS BETRAYER PRESENT.

THE SAVIOR ALSO LIVED IN THE ASSURANCE OF THE LORD HIS SHEPHERD'S PROVISION: "YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL."

OIL WAS USED ON SHEEP TO SOOTH CUTS AND BITES AND TO HELP KEEP PEST AWAY.

THE FATHER PROVIDED THE BALM OF COMFORT AND STRENGTH TO JESUS. HE WAS ANOINTED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO ABIDED WITH HIM AND GUIDED HIM.

ACCORDING TO THE GOSPELS, GOD ALSO SENT A WOMAN TO ANOINT JESUS WITH OIL BEFORE HIS DEATH, WHICH GAVE HIM A GREAT SENSE OF COMFORT AND SUPPORT.

THE PSALM ALSO PROMISES THAT UNDER THE CARE OF THE SHEPHERD-"MY CUP OVERFLOWS."

JESUS' CUP OVERFLOWED WITH THE LOVE, GRACE, AND POWER OF GOD. THIS IS TRUE EVEN WITH THE CUP OF SUFFERING HE DRANK FROM FOR OUR SAKE.

AND SO JESUS COULD SAY: "SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY WILL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER."

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT JESUS, WE CAN SEE THAT GOODNESS AND MERCY NOT ONLY FOLLOWED HIM- THEY WERE PART OF HIM.

THEY WERE SO INTIMATELY INGRAINED WITHIN THEY COULD NOT BE SEPARATED FROM WHO HE WAS AND IS.

JESUS, WAS NOT SIMPLY GOOD, BUT SINLESS, AND IT WAS THE MERCY OF GOD WORKING THROUGH HIM THAT LED HIM TO THE CROSS, AND RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.

IN ALL THESE WAYS AND MANY MORE PSALM 23 DESCRIBES THE JOURNEY OF THE LIFE OF JESUS, AS WELL AS OUR OWN LIVES.

THE PSALM SHOWS HOW THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD LEADS AND CARES FOR HIS PEOPLE.

AND SO, WHEN JESUS SAID "I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD", HE UNDERSTOOD THE SHEPHERD'S ROLE FROM BOTH SIDES.

IN THIS WAY HE LEADS THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM WITH AN UNDERSTANDING NO ORDINARY SHEPHERD OF ANIMALS CAN GRASP.

FOR JESUS LEADS US ON THE JOURNEY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SHEEP AS WELL AS THE SHEPHERD.

JESUS, BY HIS HUMAN LIFE, ALSO SHOWS US THAT SOMETIMES WE NEED TO LET GOD TAKE CARE OF US, JUST LIKE HE PUT HIMSELF INTO HIS FATHER'S HANDS.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN, JESUS DID NOT SPEAK OR ACT OR MAKE CHOICES, ONLY THAT THERE WERE TIMES WHEN HE LET HIS FATHER TAKE CONTROL.

WE ALSO ARE REMINDED WE SOMETIMES REACH A POINT WHEN WE HAVE DONE WHAT WE CAN AND NEED TO TRUST GOD TO DO WHAT GOD WILLS.

THE GREATEST DEED GOD HAS DONE THROUGH JESUS IS LAYING HIS LIFE DOWN TO SAVE US.

WE CAN DO NOTHING TO ENHANCE WHAT THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD AND SAVIOR HAS DONE FOR US ON THE CROSS.

OUR ONLY RESPONSE IS TO THANK JESUS BY FOLLOWING HIM, THAT IS BY ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF LIFE HE OFFERS.

IN JESUS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD WE HAVE: PROVISION, REST, FORGIVENESS, GUIDANCE, AND THE ASSURANCE OF LIFE IN HIM NOW AND ALWAYS.

JESUS IS A MODEL FOR US TO FOLLOW, A LEADER IN WHOM WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE WILL LEAD US ON RIGHT PATHS.

THUS JESUS CALLS US, SAYING "FOLLOW ME", SO WE CAN BE GUIDED, FORGIVEN, COMFORTED, AND RESTORED BY HIM.

THIS CAN BE A BEAUTIFUL AND HELPFUL IMAGE FOR MANY PEOPLE.

AND YET, THERE CAN ALSO BE SOME RESISTANCE TO THE IDEA WE ARE SHEEP.

IN TRUTH, PEOPLE OFTEN ACT LIKE SHEEP- WE CAN BE STUBBORN, AND MAKE BAD OR EVEN STUPID CHOICES.

WE CAN ALSO, AT TIMES, BE TOO EASILY LED ASTRAY BY "HIRED HANDS", AS JESUS CALLS THOSE SHEPHERDS WHO ARE NOT HIM.

HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT GOD GAVE US MINDS CAPABLE OF MAKING INFORMED DECISIONS, AND UNLIKE SHEEP WE CAN BE LEADERS AS WELL AS FOLLOWERS.

CONSEQUENTLY, THERE ARE MANY WHO DO NOT LIKE THE IMAGE OF BEING A SHEEP FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD.

BUT SOMETIMES WE DO NEED GUIDANCE, EVEN WHEN WE THINK WE KNOW ENOUGH TO GO IT ALONE.

A MISSIONARY NAMED ELIZABETH ELLIOT LEARNED THIS THE HARD WAY WHEN SHE BEGAN WORK IN SOUTH AMERICA.

SHE HAD A GOOD SENSE OF DIRECTION SO AFTER A LITTLE WHILE SHE FIGURED SHE DID NOT NEED A GUIDE TO GO FROM ONE VILLAGE TO THE NEXT.

IT ONLY TOOK GETTING TERRIBLY LOST IN THE JUNGLE ONE TIME, TO SHOW ELIZABETH THAT IT WAS BETTER AND SAFER TO FOLLOW A NATIVE GUIDE.

THE GUIDE ALWAYS COULD FIND THE RIGHT PATH, SAW DANGER SHE MISSED, AND COULD ALSO FIND WATER AND EVEN FOOD SHE COULD NOT FIND ON HER OWN.

THIS DID NOT MEAN SHE WAS DUMB OR HELPLESS ON HER OWN, BUT RATHER SHE WAS WISE ENOUGH TO TAKE DIRECTION FROM SOMEONE WHO KNEW MORE THAN SHE.

SIMILARLY, JESUS CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM NOT BECAUSE HE THINKS WE ARE DUMB, OR ARE UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING ON OUR OWN, BUT RATHER BECAUSE HE KNOWS THE WAY BETTER THAN WE DO OR EVER CAN.

JESUS, OUR RISEN SAVIOR AND SHEPHERD, DOES WHAT NO ONE ELSE CAN DO:

HE LEADS US PERFECTLY ACCORDING TO HIS FATHER'S WILL. MAY WE BE WISE ENOUGH TO FOLLOW HIM.

LET US PRAY: LORD JESUS, YOU ARE OUR LOVING SHEPHERD, WHO KNOWS EACH OF OUR NAMES. WE GIVE YOU THANKS THAT YOU CARE FOR US, AND REJOICE IN THE FATHER'S LOVE AND MERCY WHICH YOU PROVIDE. HELP US TO REMEMBER THAT WHEN WE FACE DARKNESS AND DEATH, YOU WALK BESIDE US. WHEN WE HUNGER FOR YOUR LOVE, FILL US WITH YOUR PRESENCE, WE PRAY. SEND YOUR SPIRIT TO LEAD US FORTH TO WALK ALONG THE RIGHT PATHS, AND TEACH US TO LOVE OTHERS, AS YOU LOVE THEM AND US. IN YOUR NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: PSALM 23 & JOHN 10:11-18

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