

Psalm 23

We end our series on “Psalms for Summer” with this teaching. Psalm 23 is perhaps the most well-known of all the psalms. But do you really know it? This psalm is the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. I think every Christian should memorize John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

We think we know this verse, but every word is full of deep meaning. Every word or phrase could be a sermon in itself: “God, loved, world, He gave, only begotten Son, whoever believes, perish, everlasting life.” Every Christian should memorize John 3:16 and think about it deeply and pray over it with a grateful heart.

In the same way we should memorize Psalm 23 and think about it deeply and pray over it with a grateful heart. The key point of this short, but powerful psalm is that God’s infinite goodness and grace is our best hope for good in both this life and in the age to come. And there are eight powerful promises that support this main idea.

1. The LORD will work for me – v. 1
2. The LORD will cause me to rest – v. 2
3. The LORD will renew me – v. 3a
4. The LORD will guide me – v. 3b
5. The Lord will protect me – v. 4
6. The LORD will provide joy and strength – v. 5
7. The LORD will pursue me to do me good – v. 6a
8. The LORD will take me into His home forever – v.6b

You could take one promise a day and use it in your prayer time. There is even a bonus promise! As we study this psalm, it is my prayer that God will make these truths real to you in a concrete, practical way. So let’s begin.

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
(Psalm 23:1)

This psalm is a masterpiece throughout, but the first line is stunning! “The **LORD** is my shepherd.” The word “LORD” is a translation of God’s personal name,

which is Yahweh. His name literally means “I am who I am.” The name Yahweh refers to God’s timelessness on one hand and His self-sufficiency on the other. Psalm 90:2 says of God “from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” And Acts 17: 24, 25 reveals that God is not, “worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”

God has always been and always will be. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. And Yahweh needs no helping hand from us, nor power, nor wisdom. He is also pure love and righteousness. He was like this yesterday. He is like this today and He will be like this tomorrow. And so what a remarkable thought—the great God Almighty, Yahweh is our shepherd!

In ancient Israel, if a family needed a shepherd that lowly job went to the youngest son. The shepherd lived with the smelly, dumb sheep 24 hours a day. He guided them, nourished them and protected them. Yahweh was not forced to be our shepherd; He has chosen to be our shepherd, because of His love for us! Therefore, the second phrase of verse 1 is “I shall not want.”

Now, there are lots of things that I want. I want a Porsche and a huge RV just to start! But the phrase “I shall not want” literally means “I shall not lack. Left to themselves sheep lack everything. They are the most helpless of animals. The same is true for all of us. You may own a Porsche and I may own a dune buggy, but we both lack wisdom and righteousness and salvation. We also cannot see what is in our futures. Therefore if Yahweh is our shepherd, then the All-Sufficient One will provide all that we truly need. Stay close to the Shepherd. Cast all your cares upon Him and He will care for you!¹

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
(Psalm 23:2)

Sheep do not lie down easily. Fear keeps them alert and ready to run. Since they are herding animals they won’t rest if there is social friction in the herd. When tormented by flies and parasites they will not rest. If they are hungry they will not rest. In much the same way we are anxious and worried and fearful about so many things and we need to be made to rest.

Now you might think that this Psalm should begin with action. You know, the shepherd pushes the flock along. But no, our song begins with rest. The Christian life begins with rest, with a peaceful heart. Jesus said, “Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”² Jesus gives us

¹ 1 Peter 5:7

² Matthew 11:28

true rest because he brings us before God, the source of true rest. There will be work enough to do along the way. There will be trials and troubles. But we can endure and overcome all things, because our great God is for us. Let Him give you a peaceful heart.

He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
(Psalm 23:3)

The word “soul” here means your life—breathing, thinking, working, talking you. When the world around us tries to suck all the life out of us and squeeze us like an empty pop can, God fills us with strength and power. Isaiah 40:31 says,

But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew *their* strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

When you think circumstances have robbed you of life and your future is dark, let Yahweh refresh and restore you and guide your life. Proverbs 3:5, 6 declares,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

Do we always do this? No, we are often like dumb sheep who wander off. Thank God my Shepherd guides me. He will pull me back into the right path for His name sake. Now, what does that mean? It means that God has a reputation to uphold. He desires for all of us to see Him as the good and righteous God that He is. So if we are willing and obedient, God will work in us and cause us to live rightly so that His love and power can be seen in us. In this way He is glorified.

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.
(Psalm 23:4)

It is crucial for us to understand that the “valley of the shadow of death” is as much God's right path for us as are the green pastures. The life of a believer is not always tranquil or easy. And that is where fear and anxiety enter in. So far

the third person pronoun "He" has been used: He makes me lie down, He leads me, he guides me. But now, the psalmist turns from us, the audience and looks back stage and sings, "I will fear no evil for **YOU, Yahweh** are with me!" God is always with us.

The shepherd had a rod or club to beat off predators. His staff pulled the sheep close to him or pulled it out of danger. Let God pull you close so that you can confidently say, "I will fear no evil for **YOU** are with me." In 1 Corinthians 10:13, 14 God's Word tell us,

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*. ¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

In other words, in all of life trust God alone and lean hard on God in all things and He will see you through.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of
my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
(Psalm 23:5)

We now turn from the image of a shepherd to the image of a host at a banquet. In ancient times anointing your guest with oil was a sign of honor. And wine was a symbol of joy. Have you ever thought about the fact the God holds you in honor? We read last week from Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 that one day we will be crowned with glory and honor. Even so now, as a child of God, Yahweh holds you in high esteem. God will meet your needs, trust Him. And one day, in front of your greatest enemy, Satan, God will exalt you in glory and honor even as He destroys Satan and his evil host. Finally, there are two more promises.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.
(Psalm 23:6)

The word "mercy" would be better translated as steadfast, loyal love. God's love for you is faithful. And in the original Hebrew the word for "follow" actually means to relentlessly pursue. You see, God is not following you like a lost

puppy. He is chasing after you like the State Police. Sometimes we run because we think Yahweh will give us a ticket. But He is pursuing us to lavish upon us all of His goodness and blessings of His loyal love. And like the State Police, He will absolutely catch you! And He will bring you into His kingdom on a renewed earth, restored to paradise. And here in His home you will live in peace and joy forever.

Take time this week to meditate and pray over Psalm 23. Let the truths of this wonderful song sink deep into your hearts. Have a blessed summer.