

Hopewell ARP Prayer Meeting Lesson, Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Psalm 23

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A Psalm of David.

¹ The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
³ He restores my soul;
He leads 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 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 runs 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
Forever.

The Good Shepherd, v1. Jesus declared Himself the Good Shepherd, identifying Himself as Yahweh from many Old Testament passages, including this one. In Psalm 22, we had the great Psalm of Him laying down His life for the sheep. In this Psalm, we have the great Psalm of Him living to lead His sheep who know His voice and follow Him.

The word for Shepherd is actually a participle of the verb for shepherding. This gives a tone of activity and constancy to the statement. Of course, then, with Him constantly and actively shepherding us, we will not lack anything. In our union with Jesus and communion (fellowship) with Jesus, it is impossible that we would lack anything—anything material or spiritual, anything good.

When we need rest, v2. The word for green pastures implies the youngest, best, tender grass. This is where He gives us rest. The waters themselves in the second part are waters of quietness. Whenever we have rest, we ought to see in it the tenderness and compassion of our Lord Jesus.

When we need restoration, v3. The first line of this stanza can refer to conversion, but how many are the wanderings and spiritual declensions that a believer may pass through in this life. Our Shepherd will always restore us. His path is righteous, and it leads us to righteousness, and He leads us in righteousness. Since this is initiated within God Himself (“For His Name’s sake”), nothing in time or creation can undo it.

When we need reinforcement, v4. Because life is fraught with the threat of death, and we often come near it, its shadow falls often upon our path and climactically at the end of that path. But in every one of those instances, we must not fear either any harm or any wicked foe. The most important variable in each situation actually isn’t at all variable: The Lord Jesus is with us.

The rod is for defense and direction; the staff has a crook on the end and is useful for support and even yanking out of danger in a pinch. Our Shepherd has complete sway over every enemy and every danger; He directs/corrects us as necessary, and lifts and rescues us as needed.

When we need refreshment, v5. The preparation of the table indicates not a meager portion but a feast. How helpless is that enemy who must watch both the preparations and the feasting itself, and can do nothing to stop it! The rest of the verse highlights the welcome (You anoint my head with oil) and the portion (my cup runs over) that we may expect at His table. There is no stinginess or shortness of supply here. Only abundance that no enemy can stop.

Relentlessly, v6. Several terms in this verse underscore the relentlessness of the Lord’s blessing us. “Surely” emphasizes certainty and has a tone of exclusivity (“only”). “Follow” means to hunt, chase down, and persecute. Good and steadfast love are ever hot on our heels, wherever we go. “All the days” and “for length of days” (“forever”) are self-explanatory. Good and steadfast love are aspects of God’s character. They cannot fail anymore than He can stop being God.¹ The path of the believer has in it many twists and turns, through many locations. But He is with us in all of it; His goodness and covenant-love are always right on top of us; and, it always ends at last in His house.

¹ There is a translation question between “dwell in” and “return to.” The latter is supported by the vowel pointings, which admittedly came later.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording referenced above)

Well we come to Psalm 23 tonight. And spray.

Our Father in heaven we thank you for. Giving us the privilege of calling you Father. Even though yours is the kingdom and the glory and the power. Forever and ever and there are so many of your names. Which make us tremble with all. Your infinite greatness. And yet you give us some names to use like Father or Shepherd.

In which you have into which you have built, sweetness and nearness and tenderness comfort confidence joy. We thank you that this one in particular you have. Used in your word on his. Incarnate lips to describe our Lord Jesus. So we pray that your spirit would turn our hearts especially towards him.

As we consider the Psalm. Which we ask also in his name. Amen.

A psalm of David. Yahweh is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. Yeh that 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. You prepare a table before me. In the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy. Shall, follow me. All the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the health. Of Yahweh. Forever.

So for the reading of God's Word. So I was. Studying to prepare the lesson one of the commentators said. Probably no other six consecutive verses of Scripture have been more memorized in the history of the church. I don't know whenever someone says something like that. I want to look through my Bible for another set of six verses to see if it might be more memorized than these.

But these are precious. And. I hope some of the preciousness and sweetness will come home to our hearts by the ministry of the spirit for which we have just asked. Starts out by saying Yahweh is my shepherd. There are a few places several places in the Old Testament where Yahweh has identified as a shepherd.

I think the first one is actually on the lips of Jacob when he's recounting looking back on the course of his life and he refers to the Lord as the shepherd who has saved me out of every adversity. But when the Lord Jesus comes and declares himself the good shepherd.

That is a very strong claim to divinity. He is claiming to be among other things the Jehovah the Yahweh of Psalm 23. So in Psalm 22, you have the Great Psalm of him laying down his life for the sheep. And looking forward to spreading a feast for them. The last portion of the Psalm that we had last week.

And then in this psalm we have not the Good Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep, but remember also he had authority to take his life up again and he lives to lead his sheep. This is the counterpart to that wonderful little verse in Hebrews, which says that he is able to save us to the uttermost by the power of his indestructible life and our Lord Jesus did rise again from the dead and he personally shepherds us.

He leads us he is with us and he is bringing us all the way home, that's the mission that he's on. You remember and he was telling his disciples that he was going away. He said he was going away to prepare room and prayer place and his father's house for there are many rooms or many mansions and not only is that the end point of all this but he also said I'm not going to leave you as orphans and he describes the gift of the Holy Spirit you're in your familiar with hearing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Well, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the fellowship with the with the entire Trinity the Father and the Son and the Spirit because Jesus says that the Father and the Son are going that he and the Father are going to come and make their dwelling with us by the ministry of the Spirit.

So if the Lord Jesus is our shepherd and in him the triune God is our shepherd then surely we will not lack for anything. The word for shepherd here is not. Just a noun. It has a participle for those of you who have made. A study of such things if we were to stretch out the translational a little bit more in order to emphasize that we would say Yahweh is the one shepherding me or the shepherding one of me which does get kind of clunky and awkward but the fact that it's a participle and a present active participle.

In English means that it's implying activity and constancy that this is what he is doing. Of course then if the Lord is constantly an actively shepherding us we're not going to lack anything. In our union with Jesus and come union with Jesus which just means fellowship but in our being joined to him and having fellowship with him, it is impossible that we would like anything material anything spiritual anything at all, that would be good for us.

The Lord Jesus is our shepherd and the triune God in him is our shepherd. So when he says I shall not want. He's talking about the utter impossibility of lacking anything that we need or that would be good for us as a believer. And then he gives several verses in the middle section versus two through five when we need rest verse two when we need restoration or recovery verse three.

When we need reinforcement or comfort verse four, and when we need refreshment verse five. We need rest. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. Let's translated green pastures here doesn't just mean the ordinary field in which you might find grazing grass. It refers to the tender new grass the picture is of the of the shepherd having brought the sheep to feed in multiple places which are good but now that it's time for the sheep to lie down.

He finds the gentlest softest nicest new fresh cool grass. See to lie in And then he leads me beside and they are waters of quietness or waters of restfulness. Very very sweet peaceful images in in verse 2. So he gives us that rest when we need it. And then he gives us also restoration or recovery when we he restores my soul.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. He restores my soul is similar to a phrase that we found in Psalm 19 talking about the law of the Lord restoring or converting the soul. In this case, we know we're already converted but the word restore can have many a broad range of meaning Restoration or recovery from any number of things even we use that word for recovery.

From illness or recovering something, that is lost. In the case of sheep. Probably most often recovery from wondering. Yet this he restores my soul again, it's all purpose just like the I shall not want as I shall not want anything the he restores my soul is he restores my soul from anything and everything and I think those of us he have had times of backsliding and spiritual decline dullness or even coming to find much fleshly pleasure sinful pleasure in things for a time and the Lord brings us to new.

Conviction. Sometimes that new conviction that we come to and those ups and downs of the Christian life is even more intense or more painful than our original conviction have being convicted about your sin and sorry for it and hating it and grieving it and seeing how worthy the Lord is of your love and service and obedience.

All of those things are right emotions and right desires and shouldn't surprise us as he grows us in him that. Although we do not stop sinning sometimes when he does recover us it is a feeling as intense as conversion and if you have had that experience and you have fallen into a mistake that I run into a few times just discussing with someone the story of the grace of God in their lives the intensity of being recovered at some point within their Christian walk has made them question whether they were converted before.

Because they've yeah, they've had this idea of conversionism or decisionism that we have and a lot of the churches and they think oh wow that was way bigger than the thing that I had yeah, however many years ago, maybe that's what I was converted and yet we have in Psalm 23 verse 3 scripture instruction that this is going to be the experience of us with our shepherd he restores our soul and that's a wonderful.

Wonderful truth if you happen to be in a time of spiritual coldness or backsliding or sinning. You know, one of the lies that we can believe is well if I already can if I was already converted and this is how I'm like again or what I'm still like maybe there's no hope for me no there is hope for you because the Lord Jesus is Yahweh, who is your hope he died and rose again to be your hope and one of the things he does as your shepherd is restore your soul, there is hope with him there is restoration with him and the sweetness that you find in him and those times moments seasons of.

This of restoration can be as good and more intense even than the first time you ever came to him or were converted to him he was towards my soul, he leads me in the paths of righteousness. The word comes from a root that means straight but that form of the word has never used to mean physically straight so I'm just saying that because you may have run across this psalm and some translations that says he leads me in straight paths it the right translation is he leads me in paths of righteousness.

Now this means multiple things one is his paths are always righteous and always right you never have to worry about missing out on God's plan for your life you are in it and he has always doing rightly now we need course corrections sometimes because we are sinning and he leads us in paths of righteousness that way bringing us to renewed repentance and then in a third way he leads us in paths of righteousness.

Because that's ultimately the destination of the path. Even if.

Go ahead and use it but mind you don't think lightly of of the the real thing by the illustration and even if the Holy Spirit must rewrite you. Because you weren't following the directions or you are trying to follow the directions and he reroutes you in his providence because there's some obstacle up ahead that you didn't know about but the destination is always the righteousness of God, so he restores your soul when necessary he leads you in the paths of righteousness and this can't fail because it's for his namesake.

It's not for your namesake, it's not initiated by you and responded to by God no the cause for God doing you all this good and being with you and leading you in a path that must end in righteousness with him the cause for all that is found in himself.

He's the one who freely chose whom he would save whom he would shepherd with whom he would have this relationship it's for his namesake and that which has its source and cause within God himself cannot be undone by something in creation or in time. Our flesh wants to say no.

I want to be the one who chose I want to. I want to think that everyone has the the same. Possibility and it's we who make the choice who make the difference no if that's if that's the case then every one of us would mess ourselves up he does it for his own namesake and there's great

comfort in the fact that the cause for our redemption the cause for our having come into it of our walking in it now and of the arriving at last at the destination is something that is within God himself and therefore it cannot be undone and it is.

It is for his glory, so he's our good shepherd when we need rest and we restoration when we need reinforcement yay and the Hebrew word really is even even though I walk through the valley of death shadow. I will fear no evil for you are with me your rod and your staff they comfort me.

Now this valley of death shadow and it's a death shadow or darkest shadow which I implies death this doesn't just mean the point at which you come to die, although for many believers throughout the ages that has been a point at which this was precious to cling to and recite and sing but the fact of the matter is we live all of our life in this age in sin and misery and death itself casts its shadow back over our entire.

Life so that there are many experiences in which we don't know whether or not we're going to die or we feel agony as if we are about to die you remember the apostle Paul describes himself at what at one point as often dying. A. That might be literal like he was resurrected a whole bunch of times or he might be talking about caring about in the body the dying of Christ and the fact that many times he was well at least once he was literally left for dead and many times he was on the verge of death well our lives are full of moments in which death itself casts its shadow back upon us but the Lord Jesus has freed us from the power of the devil that he has through the fear of.

Death we don't fear death when we have the Lord Jesus with us and so in the most difficult moments in our lives, we don't need to feel sorry we don't need to fear either any harm or any wicked foe because the Lord is with us. The most important variable in each situation in your life is something that is not variable.

Everything else varies everything else changes, but the Lord doesn't and he's with you and all of those things and so you need not fear harm or the wicked foe because he is with you he's with you with rod and staff now the rod is a defense and direction instrument it's more pleasant when he uses it on others and defends us.

And yet it is often needful for him to use it on us to correct us but that's not the only or even the primary instrument he is as on us the staff here the shepherd's death now not beautifully polished like you've seen and probably second commandment violating pictures but the the shepherd staff has that crook in it and it's used to help the sheep get over an obstacle that you know, maybe pudgy sheep had a little too much grass at lunch and needs a little boost.

Or to yank out of a hole or it's a it's a rescue and support instrument anyway, the the point is that he does everything necessary in both his acting on others and his acting on our circumstances and even in his acting upon us to make sure that there's no circumstance in our life that can ultimately harm us every one of them must ultimately do us good so long as our shepherd is with us and, His rod and staff are in use our being employed.

So when we need rust when we need restoration or recovery when we need reinforcement or comfort or defense and when we need refreshment you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil my cup runs over. This is more than just when your enemies get there that the Lord is able to provide for you in the midst of it.

He's actually providing and preparing provision for you right in the presence of the enemies themselves. Now, the preparation of a table here does not indicate a meagre portion. They weren't like we are where everybody has their dinner table and you set out the the napkins and the dishes and the flatware and the glasses at every meal.

And we live like kings. This is a kingly feast that's being described here and the the picture is precious it's of enemies who helplessly look on while the table is being set and can't do anything about it knowing that a great feast is being prepared for us. Ultimately that that feast is the fellowship of and the benefits of the Lord himself and something that no enemy can stop you think of Job and the attacks of the devil that were used to give him so much greater and knowledge of God than he had had even as the most blameless person on earth.

The rest of the verse the anointing of the head with oil and the cup running over. Now the anointing with oil can refer to ordination or it can be as it probably is in the context of a kingly feast the.

You remember when? Jesus was at the Pharisee's house and the Pharisee had given him no water for his feet to no oil to anoint him. And here the Lord is not so stingy with us as the Pharisee was with him the welcome this indicates the welcome that we have with Christ that he refreshes us this would probably have been some kind of perfumed oil and then.

You don't get to say when when he fills your cup with the good wine, he fills it and it runs over and the the implication is that there's no stinginess or lack of supply whatsoever at the feast of the Lord. A very strong parallel between verse 5 and his preparing a feast for us and welcoming us and and portioning out without any stinginess whatsoever abundant excessive portions, so there's a very strong parallel between that and verses 22 through 31 of Psalm 22, which we heard last week of being invited to the vow offering feast of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Upon his resurrection and so there's great refreshment and welcome and generosity here in in verse 5 and then the point of verse 6 is that all of this is relentless all of this is relentless. The word surely has a sense of certainty it also has a sentence sense of exclusivity.

It can be translated in some contexts as only the but the the point is that it is absolutely certain that in every circumstance we will have goodness instead fast love or goodness and covenant

love good and covenant love from the Lord shall follow me the word for follow isn't the way sheep follow it's the way wolves follow sheep, it's a word that means chase or hunt down when it's used of people it means.

Persecute. And so the the word the use of that word with the goodness and the steadfast love of God is precious to us you may not be able to see it don't know if you've ever been running and not known whether or not you are being chased and you just ran harder and harder and harder because you thought you might be being chased and then you turn around and you know the person or dog or whatever it was that you thought was chasing you is almost out of.

However far away it is but not so with the goodness of God and the steadfast love of God it is always on your heels it is always hunting you down chasing you down persecuting you if you can use that word for its intensity without the negative connotation so surely and chasing and all the days of my life and then the word words translated.

Forever for length of days. All of this point to how intense how relentless. The goodness of God the goodness of our Lord Jesus that we have taught us in this psalm is that. You know, relentless is is the word there's another one that I'm. Can't lay my brain on right now, but the love and goodness of God that won't be denied that won't give up that has always always always pursuing us so that we will dwell or return.

If the root verb is Yashov it's dwell the way is pointed in pointed. Hebrew texts, it's from shoe which is return, but the point is that the path of the believer always ends at last in the house of the Lord. It may have many twists and turns it may go through many things but he is all he is with us and all of it and his goodness and covenant love are always right on top of us and it always ends at last in his house because the Lord Jesus is our shepherd.

Lord Jesus is the creator he's the law giver he's the king he's the judge all of these are true of him. But here in this poem and at other places he uses of himself the word shepherd so that we may have the sweetness and the nearness and the confidence in him.

Something that he desires for us to have. So do not.

Do not fall into thinking that the Lord Jesus is merely terrifying or frightful or to make you tremble you ought to fear him and tremble before him but he's also near and tender and earnest for your good and always having fellowship with you and continuously seeking out, you know, the very best blades of glass blades of grass for you to lay on.

If you use the word victor from verse two, there's a sweetness and compassion here that we ought to find in him which perhaps is one of the reasons why this is one of the most memorized and beloved psalms in scripture, so let us come to our time of prayer this evening.

Remembering as we do that when the disciples asked. The Lord Jesus to teach them to pray. The the term of address that he gave them for it is similarly one that is tender and dear he has us even though his name is hallowed and he's a king and the kingdom and the power and the glory are all his yet though the word that Jesus gave us in his model prayer his father.

Very similar to calling the Lord Jesus our shepherd in that regard.