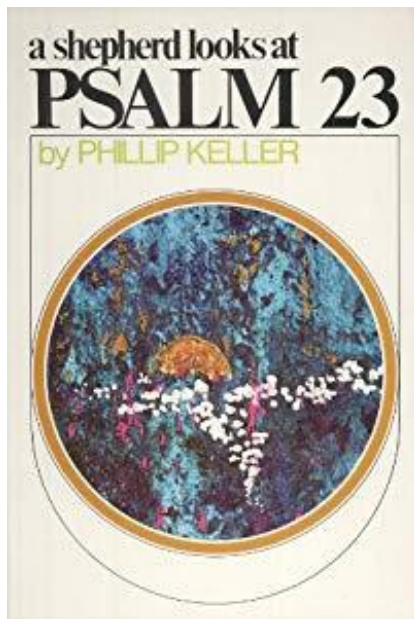


Sunday Morning - March 15, 2020 - FINAL SERMON ON PSALM 23



15 THE FAITHFUL PROVISION OF THE LORD

23 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. (NKJV).

It is a little funny that today is the Ides of March. This is the day in history when Julius Caesar was assassinated by his closest friends on March 15, 44 BC. He was killed by a threat up close and personal. The American psyche is now filled with fear over a threat that is up close and personal, the Corona Virus known as COVID-19.

Friday night at dinner, a member of Union Grove asked me to teach on a specific passage to counter what many are feeling during this Pandemic. I think God in His divine omniscience planned that today would be the day when I summarized and ended our study of Psalm 23. Why do I say that?

I say that because in Psalm 23 we see a wonderful laundry list of the magnificent, wonderful, and powerful provisions of Almighty God in the life of each and every believer. It is perhaps one of the most wonderfully comforting passages of the entire Bible. David, the shepherd who had become a king, knew of the habits of sheep. He knew that humans were much like sheep in many different ways. He knew that, like a shepherd caring for his sheep, God Himself lovingly and watchfully cares for every detail needed in the life of the believer.

He begins the psalm by making the almost boastful and perhaps self-assuring statement, "The LORD is MY Shepherd!" He uses the Holiest Name of God in the text which we insufficiently render as "The Lord." His use of the name יהוה, sometimes written as "YAHWEH," is an

acrostic rendering of the Hebrew verb meaning "to be." Contained within those four characters is the Almighty, Magnificent, and Unending description of God's character. It lacks definition when we poorly put in the King James' English "I am that I am." In the fullness of its Hebrew meaning it says, "I was and always have been He who met you at your point of need in the past. I am He who meets you at the point of your need in the present, and I am He who will be there to meet you at your point of need in the future." This is not a distant ethereal God to David. Rather, this is a personal God with Whom David enjoys a personal relationship such as a sheep who is led by the most benevolent of shepherds. Yes! The LORD is MY Shepherd, *and* the LORD is YOUR shepherd. Is He your personal shepherd today, or are you looking on with curiosity from outside of the sheepfold?

Next, David, gloriously defines the provision of the precious Shepherd in his life. He states that because the LORD is that Shepherd to him, HE IS IN NEED OF NOTHING! That is a promise that applies to us, as believers, as well. He is telling the reader 3,000 years later that when this Precious, Loving, and Magnificent God is our Shepherd, all of our psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs are met not just adequately, but with an OVERFLOW. He will tell us near the end of his psalm of praise that his cup runs over with the goodness and mercy of a precious, almighty, loving caretaker who provides for him in every way and in every stage of his life.

It is this Shepherd and He alone that can settle His sheep (being US) down enough to find the food and water they need to have their souls restored. The food we feast on is provided by the Shepherd. It is God's filling, restoring, and sufficient Word of God. David will describe this Word of God further in the Psalms as being more precious than gold, even much fine gold, and sweeter also than honey and the honey comb (Psalm 19:10). Some of us are needing our souls restored today. You might be filled with anxiety about the corona virus. You might be fearful that it could find its way into your lungs or into your body. Put those fears and anxiety aside today because if you are part of His sheepfold, your destiny is in the hands of the most loving of all shepherds.

When we recognized God's love for us, and when we fall in love with Jesus, we accept all that He did for us. It is the receiving of that gospel that causes us to never thirst again. When we drink of His water, it becomes like a spring of living water rising up within our souls. " *As Scripture says, 'Streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me.'*" ³⁹ *Jesus said this about the Spirit, whom his believers would receive. The Spirit was not yet evident, as it would be after Jesus had been glorified." (John 7:38b-39, GNT).*

Then David gives the most comforting of assurances when he states in verse 3, "*He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*" David is telling each and every believer that we have a heavenly Father above with eyes full of mercy and a heart full of love. This heavenly Shepherd will whisper to us with the Holy Spirit that He has put within each of us, telling us which path to take in life. He urges us on to pursue that path of righteousness. He is cheering us on to choose that path of holiness. He has prepared works for us to do once we have been saved by His precious grace (Ephesians 2:8-10). The wonderful thing is that as we submit to

Him and do these acts of righteousness, we bring glory and honor to Him. Jesus sort of paraphrased that when He said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they might see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16, NKJV). The doing of those wonderful, God ordained works is that you and I can have a reason and a purpose for our lives. I've told each of you time and again that God has a purpose, a plan, and a place for you during your journey on this earth. The good works you do don't save you, but they are done for "His name's sake." That means they are a good reflection of God who has directed you in such works.

Next, David turns to the assurance of God's provision for each of us when we pass through or are in the middle of the most horrible, trying, terrifying, or challenging events of our lives. He characterizes the trials of life as "walking through the valley of the shadow of death, while fearing no evil." This speaks to EACH and EVERY challenge that comes our way. You may experience psychological darkness. You may experience emotional death. You may be in the middle of a battle for your health. You may experience spiritual shadows, but you can go through each and every hardship that comes your way, knowing that YOU have a Shepherd Who knows EVERYTHING you're experiencing and who has given you a HOLY SPIRIT COMFORTER that can provide the ONLY COMFORT that can put salve on your troubled soul and spirit. The comfort that we feel in the middle of the circumstance is the blessed assurance that "HE IS THERE!"

Even when we feel disconnected and might wonder whether God really knows our circumstance, He does. David proclaims that the Shepherd's rod and staff bring comfort to him. Anyone who has ever handled livestock (or gone to a livestock event) has watched while the handlers occasionally just touch their animal with a rod or staff they carry. This communicates, "I am here. I have not left you. I am directing you. I am at your side." How precious of a picture that is of what God does for each of us. Scripture tells us over and over that He will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). Additionally, when we stray from that "path of righteousness" His staff gently corrects us and redirects us to where we need to be. The "rod" spoken of by David is most likely a reference to the shepherd's club that chases off any threat, predator, or other thing that would bring harm to the sheep. He also lovingly gives us faith to use as a shield (faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God), and He gives us His Word to use offensively as the "sword of the spirit" spoken of in Ephesians chapter 6. Whether it is God's rod or His staff, both are there for our comfort in whatever circumstance we might find ourselves.

Then David declares a GLORIOUS SIGHT. THOU OH LORD DOST PREPARE FOR ME A FEAST IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES. God give us His Word, His Spirit, and His every provision to provide a banqueting feast for each and every believer. I know when I am under stress and affliction, I am not able to eat. This psalm tells us that even with our enemies within sight, He can settle us down enough to eat the great banquet He has provided for each and every one of us. Our "enemies" can include financial worry. The enemy might be spiritual warfare. The enemy might be a global pandemic. He is here to give us the knowledge that even with that threat within eyesight, you and I can eat at the banqueting table He has provided for us.

David then shouts, "You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over!" Like a shepherd that pours medicinal oil over the head of his sheep, David says that our Shepherd pours healing oil over each of us. And, not just a little, but TO OVERFLOWING! I won't take time to tell you all of the pests and parasites that can infect a sheep's head, but I'll tell you what sort of pests can get into our heads. We can become overwhelmed with a sense of doom in the face of germs and viruses that might "get us." We can become hopeless in the face of circumstances that are out of our control. Our minds can race thinking of every harm that might befall us. STOP IT NOW IN THE NAME OF JESUS. Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah echoing through time into your ears.

²⁸ Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the LORD,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the weak,

And to those who have no might He increases strength.

³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

³¹ 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.

(Isaiah 40:28-31, NKJV).

Yes, He anoints our head and hallelujah our cup runs over! There is no end to the goodness and the mercy of the Lord!

Then David says, knowing all of this, that every sheep in the sheepfold should know that GOODNESS and MERCY SHALL follow us ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES. God did not bring you this far in your life to pour out evil and judgement on you. Judgment is reserved for the unbeliever. Judgment doesn't fall on believers. Goodness and mercy SHALL follow you all the days of your life. The passage doesn't say that "goodness and mercy MIGHT follow you all the days of your life;" it says "goodness and mercy SHALL follow you all the days of your life." That is a promise!

We are told to "walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Therefore, your pastor is telling you today, "GET YOUR EYES OFF OF THE FEARS OF THE WORLD! THERE IS NO ROOM FOR FEAR IN THE HEART OF THE BELIEVER." With respect to the current pandemic, let us be prudent. Let us be careful. Let us plan. Let us be mindful. BUT NEVER let us fear! Why? *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).*

Then David gives us the most comforting words of all. He declares, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." You know the wonderful thing about being a believer is that He will make provision for you while you are in this life, and He will make provision for you in His house forever.

Knowing the Lord is the greatest comfort any human being can experience. If you don't know Him today, you can receive Him as your own. He loves you JUST AS YOU ARE. I would encourage you to come AS you are. Don't try to clean up your act to be able to come to Him. You can't get yourself clean enough to stand before the God of the Universe. I love the old hymn we sing,

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come*

Brothers and sisters, I am here today to tell you that you have a Shepherd that knows you better than you know yourself. He loves you. He is ready to make provision for you when you come to the end of yourself. I ask you today to "let go and let God!"

It is when we realize that we are hopelessly lost in ourselves and our sin, and when we realize that we can come to Him with nothing, that He gives us everything. He only asks that we come. We come as we are ready to love Him, acknowledge Him, and receive Him and His work on the cross for us. Then, and only then, can we say with David and with full assurance, "surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Let us pray.

<p>Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.</p>
