



JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Scripture: Psalm 23 and John 10:11-18

Most of the time if you go to see a doctor, they give you a prescription. Take the prescription exactly as I write it. I am not saying not to take notice of your doctor, but I

wonder what would happen if for 5 times a day for 7 days you read prayerfully and carefully the 23rd Psalm?

The power of this Psalm is a prescription for the problems and pressures of today. One of the things that we certainly need if we are going to have a life worth living is a faith in something that is big enough for life. The psalmist begins where we always need to begin...with a God worth serving.

The Bible references many times that God is our Shepherd and that we are His sheep. The Hebrew word for shepherd is ROHI. One of God's names is Jehovah-Rohi which means the Lord – shepherd. David recognized that God cared for him the same way that he had cared for the sheep when he was growing up.

1st Peter 2:25 says that we are like sheep going astray, but we have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls – Jesus Christ.

Every promise in this psalm hangs on the power of this. The psalmist says, "I believe in God; I believe that God cares, and I believe that God cares about me." The Lord is my Shepherd.

Sheep are not the brightest of animals. They are defenceless and dependent, and they live by faith in the shepherd. David is saying that in our anxious, nervous world we, too, live in dependence on our Shepherd.

Have you ever been so sure of where you were going that others with you try to say – no, I think it is this way? But you continue on until you realise you had gone the wrong way by not listening to someone else?

Pride sometimes keeps us from admitting our need for direction. David knew the pain of trying to chart his own course. The prophet Nathan confronted him with his sin, and in that moment of brokenness, the shepherd-king saw his need for divine direction.

I don't need anything reveals the perfection of God's loving protective care. We, as His sheep need nothing. David is saying - because God is my shepherd, I have everything I really need.

At the end of his Philippian letter, Paul wrote, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." But the tragedy is that many of us live our lives at the corner of complaint and regret. "If only I had this...or if only this had not happened to me."

The promise is that we will have everything we really need for a life worth living: I grow tired... He restores my soul.

This is a picture of complete peacefulness and rest. As God's people, we are like sheep and don't have enough sense to go into the pastures for food and find the quiet waters.

So the Good Shepherd leads us, His beloved ones to a place of sustenance and rest.

Revelation 7:16-17 says Never again will we hunger or thirst. For, Jesus, the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be our Shepherd. He will lead us to springs of living water. And He will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

He makes me lie down where the pastures are green and the waters are still.

Peace is one of the great themes of the Bible. Jesus left His disciples a lasting legacy: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

What is peace? The absence of problems and pressures? No. These are a part of the “givens” of our lives. Is peace the absence of all conflict? No, there are times when even Jesus calls us into conflict with the destructive forces of life.

Peace is really built on the promise of His presence. “My peace,” Jesus said, He leaves with us. Peace is the presence of His Spirit in our lives.

God knows our limits. Sheep do not know their limits. They will stay in the fields all day never resting. The Shepherd makes them lie down. The principle of this passage is that God will never put on us more than we can bear.

Prayer is going to the still waters. It’s getting our bearings in a world where we are beckoned in a thousand directions. Prayer is realizing again that God is in control, and that brings peace to our lives.

He restores my weary soul.

David knew the need for the renewing power of God. From a shepherd boy, he had risen to be King. He had it all, but sometimes when we think we have it all we forget our need for God. Great was the fall of David when Nathan confronted him with his sin.

“God restores my soul,” David said. God picks me up when I’ve fallen; He lifts me when the load is heavy; in my weakness God comes with the renewing of His omnipotence.

We need soul refreshment because we experience spiritual carelessness, difficult circumstances, secret sin and influences from the world in which we live.

God, the creator of heaven and earth desires an intimate involvement with us – He wants to lead us not just point the way.

He guides me into righteous paths for His Glory.

God's nature is to guide. He's not a reluctant leader. We are often reluctant followers. His leadership is sufficient. Our "followship" is often uncertain, hesitant and tentative. Like sheep we wander from the fold, but the nature of the shepherd is to seek the one lost sheep. The remarkable arithmetic of Jesus' parable is that the Good Shepherd will leave the ninety-nine to share His love with even the one.

Even as I go through dark valleys and even death, I need not fear any evil for He is always with me.

The Darkest Valley is not a place to remain - it is a place that we pass through to get to the other side where we will experience eternal privileges, pleasures and joy.

I am sure we have all been in that dark place during our lives but we are told that the Lord will be with us.

What do we need when we have lost hope? What is the one thing that keeps us at living even when we are tempted to give up? This is Hope which is easier to describe than to define. You can see it in the eyes of children at Christmas time and in others when their circumstances have dramatically changed for the better.

And you can see the absence of hope in the eyes of many today when they seem stuck in a terrible situation – you can notice their vacant eyes that stare but don't really see. We need hope for a life worth living. And this hope comes through the certainty of God's presence.

The songwriter said it well, "When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace; in every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

Palestine is a land of great mountains and deep valleys. As the sheep moved through the valleys darkened by the shadows of the mountains, they were assured of one thing—the Shepherd’s presence. This is our certain hope! Life moves on, and sometimes we go through the shadowy stretches. Even there God is with us.

His rod and staff comfort me?

As a child I misunderstood the word rod – I thought that it was to discipline me. But in fact God’s rod refers to the rod that Shepherds always carried – it was a rod made of oak and was around 2 feet or 60cm in length.

The ancient shepherd travelled light. In his belt he carried a rod to defend the sheep from attack and a staff to support and help guide the sheep. The psalmist says that his hope is in a God who will guard and guide his life.

As a pastor, I often go into situations where people are hurting or grieving. I realize that my abilities and words are limited. But what gives me strength is to know that I come in the name of One who is a good, guarding, guiding Shepherd.

He prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies - My cup overflows.

The high summer range where the sheep grazed was referred to as “tablelands.” The Shepherd would go ahead of the sheep to remove the noxious weeds and other things that might harm his sheep on the “tablelands.”

This means Jesus prepares a table of refreshments safely inside His tent, while the enemies cannot enter and have to sit just outside. They can see the blessings we are receiving but they cannot come in.

The Good Shepherd literally feeds His children – us in front of those who criticize us; deny Christ; judge us; abuse us.

He anoints my head with oil.

No matter how carefully the shepherd prepares the way, the sheep are still bruised and wounded by the thorns and thistles. At the end of each day, the shepherd gently rubs the healing oil onto the wounds of the sheep.

The psalmist squarely faces the reality of evil and suffering in this world. Even those who follow the shepherd endure the pain of living in a world such as ours. Sometimes we are wounded by the effects of our own sin, but often we are hurt by being a part of a world where suffering is a reality and where it rains on the just and the unjust.

Notice the shepherd does not scold the sheep for their wounds. He tends to the wounds. This is a portrait of a forgiving, gracious God who really does care for His children.

Goodness and mercy shall be with me all the days of my life and I will reside in the house of the Lord forever.

David looked beyond the pasture into the future and he is heartened by the glorious prospect of dwelling forever with the Lord.

The Hebrew expression forever means the length of days and describes a reality in the present that continues into the future.

David tells us we will all dwell in God's house, even as we walk our path on earth.

So what can we take away from this?

In our second reading in John Jesus describes Himself as the gate for the sheep to enter.

The Shepherd would herd his flock into an enclosed area and then lie in the entrance so the sheep could not get out and no enemies could get in.

Jesus describes 3 benefits of entering into God's sheepfold.

In **Acts 4:12** He tells us that those sheep – us – will be saved.

That we will come in and go out which means we are not prisoners or trapped – we can freely move about secure in His protection and provision.

That we will find pasture which means we will be given constant sustenance for our soul.

There is no other Good Shepherd – there is no other on this earth or in heaven that can do this.

But there are those who say they believe in God, but never really trust Him. Faith is more than belief. It is the trusting of ourselves to God, depending on Him to lead us to a life worth living.

A part of the power of this Psalm is that it is a roadmap and not a globe. It touches us where we live and hurt and struggle. We soon discover that if we are to have a life worth living we need a power from beyond ourselves.

All of us need a renewing power for life. Like David that is sometimes difficult to confess. But when we admit our weakness, God supplies His supernatural strength.

Who controls you today; who leads you; what are you following that brings you a sense of peace in our troubled and tense times?

We can have peace. But it must be His peace. "My peace I give to you." The question, "Will we receive His gift?"

No wonder the psalmist lives with a sense of a life overflowing with blessing. His gratitude is not dependent on what happens to Him but rather on the God Who "happens" to him through all of the experiences of his life.