

Psalm 23

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Date: 23 October 2016

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[0:00] Later he did become king and committed adultery, ended up getting usurped by his own son before getting the kingdom back and dying of old age.

So he had an eventful life, lots of difficult times, not just the responsibility of an entire kingdom, but also personal circumstances as well. So I want to look at this psalm at how we can be satisfied regardless of these circumstances.

How do we have this peace and fulfillment that David is describing here? So if we look at the first verse, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

As I said, wanting is something that is natural to us. It's something that God has designed us to do. We have natural desires where we want things like food and sleep and the company of other people.

We also have a desire to worship, which Myles was talking about last week. So there's a natural desire in us to want to worship something.

[1:16] And here David is saying that he is satisfied because the Lord is his shepherd. So the Lord, the creator, the God of heaven has put himself in the place of shepherd.

And because of this, we, his sheep, if we follow Christ, we won't have any room for lacking if we fully look to Jesus as our shepherd.

If we're fully satisfied in him, then we won't want for anything regardless of our circumstances. So this isn't saying that we won't have any physical needs anymore.

As long as we're alive in this life, we will always have physical needs. But I think this is a deeper meaning that if we seek Jesus and we are following Jesus and looking to him, then our inner self will be content and have a peace which God will give us.

So the Lord puts himself in the position of a shepherd. And we know from Jesus saying that he is the good shepherd.

[2:34] He gave his life for the sheep. So if we look at the responsibilities of a shepherd, a shepherd is someone who has responsibility for the sheep.

They care for the sheep. They guide the sheep to where they can find food. They protect the sheep. So there's a big responsibility on a shepherd to look after the sheep.

The sheep by themselves are helpless. And so they need this person to take that role. And we should look at this simile that we have written here, that Jesus is the good shepherd.

The Lord is David's shepherd. And we should take that and take it for what it is, that the Lord is going to take responsibility to lead us and guide us. He's going to look after us.

And he's going to provide for us. So sometimes we want to go our own way. We have our own idea about things. But God's guiding is perfect.

[3:49] So that's the first thing really is that Jesus, the Lord God, is our shepherd. He has said that to us.

And here David is relying on that. David worked as a shepherd for many years. In his childhood. And so he knew the responsibilities and the things of that involved. And in the second verse, he says, He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. So we see that the Lord, as a shepherd, is leading. He's leading to good places. Good places where the sheep can grow and be satisfied with the things they need. So green pastures and still waters are perfect for sheep. That's where they want to be. And the fact is that sheep will need to be led to these places because they may find them by chance.

But other than that, they're left to their own devices and they could end up anywhere. So the shepherd is responsible for leading them to these places where they will get the water and the food that they need.

[4:59] The things that will satisfy them and keep them healthy. And so the Lord will guide us to good places as well. He said he would. And this may involve leading us through difficult places or places which aren't so good.

And the purpose is to lead us to a place which is better. So I think we can say not everything in life is good.

And we don't always feel like we're living in a perfect meadow where we have everything that we need. But God is leading us and he's providing us.

And sometimes we go through difficult times to reach a point where there is peace and there is things which God has given us to sustain us.

And these all come through through Christ leading. That God will satisfy our souls and give us a peace and a contentment when we follow him and he leads us to good places.

[6:07] And in the next verse he says he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. And I think this is amazing that the reason that he does this, he's a shepherd who leads us.

And he does it for his name's sake. So God is saying that he's putting himself first. He's also serving me at the same time.

And so those two things aren't opposed to each other. They're the same thing in this case that God will lead us for his name's sake. And this also is an incredible blessing for each of us who trust God because it's such a reliable promise.

We can't ever doubt that God won't do something for his own name's sake if we understand that God is the most beautiful, most valuable thing that there is.

And God's name is the name above all names. And he will do things to exalt his name. And so for his own name's sake, he's leading his sheep in paths of righteousness.

[7:19] And so we should really take hold of this tonight and believe it. Even if we are sometimes ignorant and rebellious towards God, this doesn't negate the fact that he will lead us in paths of righteousness.

And I just wanted to read a verse from Psalm 73 quickly. You don't have to turn there. Psalm 73, 21.

It says, That's the Psalm of Asaph.

And it's saying that even when I was ignorant and I was disobedient, that God was still holding me. He was still working. And God does it for his glory.

He's not doing us a favor. He's not doing it for our name's sake because there's some value in us. But he's doing it for his own glory. He leads his own sheep for his name's sake.

[8:33] And then we come to verse 4. It says, 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 your staff.

They comfort me. So, I think it's good just to think about what is the valley of the shadow of death. I think it's unlikely it was just a place that David went to.

But it's an experience. And it's a dark experience. So, the word that is used, the Hebrew word is salmorveth.

Excuse my pronunciation. And it's used in several places in the Old Testament. Job uses it to describe blackest darkness. It says in Job 28.3 that mortals put an end to the darkness.

They search out the furthest recesses of all in the blackest darkness. And so, it's the same word. And familiar verse, Isaiah 9.2. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

[9:38] And those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. And so, it's the same word. That this very dark situation.

The valley of the shadow of death. And so, I think it can apply to a variety of circumstances. From a depression that comes on us for either medical reasons or emotional reasons.

Or circumstances. Bereavements for losing loved ones. And lots of difficult things. From persecution and circumstances in our life which hit us hard.

And we go through these difficult and dark times. Where we have to trust God more than we did before we got to those points. So, here David says that though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death.

Though he's going through this dark time in his life. He will fear no evil. And the reason for that is because the Lord has a rod and a staff. And they comfort him.

[10:47] So, the rod for guiding his sheep. And the staff for defending his sheep. So, even in the darkest times we have the Lord with us.

Leading us and defending us. So, David says that he won't fear in these dark times. Because the shepherd is with him. So, these first four verses.

We have this whole picture of the shepherd and the sheep. And really the shepherd is guiding the sheep through different things.

He's guiding David to good places to sustain him. He's guiding him in the paths of righteousness. And he's guiding him through the difficult and the dark times.

In all these circumstances, the Lord is a shepherd protecting him. And then as we move to verses 5 and 6. The picture changes.

[11:47] We go from this picture of a shepherd and a sheep. To a picture of a feast. And celebration. And home. Which has been prepared for us.

So, we have a switch of the imagery. And the focus moves from David telling us. And telling himself what the Lord has done for him.

Where he says, the Lord is my shepherd. He does this. And he does that. To verses 5 and 6.

Where he says, you prepare a table before me. So, his prayer is now going up to God.

And he's speaking to God. In these last two verses. So, verse 5. He says, you prepare a table before me. In the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. So, he's providing. Even when there are enemies around. He says, you anoint my head with oil.

[12:49] So, there's a great honoring of this guest at the feast. That they've been anointed with oil. So, again. We can look at David's life.

We can see he had several enemies. King Saul. Being one of the biggest problems that he faced in his life. And King Saul was told that the kingdom wouldn't be passed to his son.

But would be passed to this shepherd boy, David. Who was anointed to be king. And God exalted David far above what anybody could have thought of. And God is able to show honor to us.

And to exalt us regardless of what the world is doing. So, we see this in the life of Daniel and Esther that we've been looking at recently. Where God has worked behind the scenes to overcome the plotting designed to trip these people up.

And to catch them and trap them. And God is working to exalt them for his namesake. To glorify himself. And so, this is absolutely true.

[13:58] But we know that not everyone escapes every trap. And that some people are called to die for their faith. Like today in other countries in the Middle East.

People die because they refuse to abandon the name of Christian. And these people have a feast prepared for them in eternity.

That this is just as true. That God is in heaven preparing a feast for us. And if we don't see that we are exalted before our enemies in this life.

Then we know that it's going to be true in the next life. And that God is a refuge for us. He will protect us. And that we will see this come to pass.

And that our cup will overflow. So, we will be at this wedding feast if we are one of his sheep. And he says he will anoint our head with oil.

[15:10] Which is signifying a great honour for somebody to do this at a feast. And this honour is purchased by Jesus.

So, it's not an honour that we've earned ourselves. But it's something which God has given to us. And just an amazing grace that God does so much for us.

In preparing a table for us before our enemies. And exalting us like this. Where we don't deserve anything. So, in verse 6 he says, Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So, he has made a place for us in his own house. And I just think it shows real amazing faith to say this.

That goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. Because we know that bad things happen to us. So, I think if your life is about being happy now.

[16:25] Then you can't honestly say this. Because if your life is only focused about being happy now. Then we know that good things. We know that bad things do happen to us.

Because we do have difficult times that we mentioned just earlier. That we suffer losses. We suffer sickness. And these things aren't good.

But here David says that goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. Even looking at David's life. There was so many difficult and bad things that happened.

So, why does he say this? And I think it's because he's looking at his life as not about being happy. But his life is about being satisfied in Christ and knowing God.

And so, when we think about in Romans where it says all things work together for good. To them that love God. We can read that.

[17:28] And then start seeing that God is actually using these bad experiences to reveal himself to us. And so, the times when we didn't need to rely on God so much.

And things happen. Whether we lose something or we lose our job. Or whatever it is. And we then need to trust God more. We need to rely on him. And so, God is exercising our faith.

He's working in the circumstances around us to give us a real reliance on God. And that's different in everyone's life. You know, not everyone will struggle through the same things and suffer with the same things.

But God's purpose in all things is to reveal himself to us. And so, David can quite confidently say that goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

He knows that's true. Because he's seen it in his life. He's seen that through all the difficult things and through all the good things. That they're all there to draw him closer to God.

[18:39] And he then says that he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And what I hope that will be for all of us who trust that at the end of it all, there is a home with God in the presence of God where we get to see Jesus face to face.

And so, the Lord Jesus is the good shepherd. And he knows his sheep. He lays down his life for his sheep.

And he endured the cross. And such a terrible death. But he can empathize with us.

He suffered so that he could empathize with us. And understand what it is like to live as a man with temptations.

And he is a guide. A loving guide. Who will provide for us. He will protect us. And we can be free from sin.

[19:52] Because of what he has done on the cross. Which is the greatest provision and the protection that we could ever hope for. He set an example for us to follow.

By giving everything to do the will of his father. He has sent his spirit to guide us and comfort us through our life. And he has gone to prepare that feast in heaven.

So that we can receive our crown of glory. Which will last forever. So this amazing hope.

Amazing truth. Which David has recognized here. That there is so much ahead of him. Even after death.

And so I just wanted to think about a few points of application from this. So firstly that we should trust the God who puts himself in the position of a shepherd.

[20:54] So he will do the things a shepherd will do. He will protect us. He will guide us. And he will provide for us. And we should trust that he will do that. Because he said he would. And we should worship God.

Because he's doing it for his own glory. And I just think that's an amazing thing. That God is so much greater than us. So much more valuable than us.

And I think that the fact that God does all these things to glorify himself. To exalt himself means that when we see all these things happening to us.

We shouldn't think how is this affecting me. How should I react to this. We should worship God in response to the way that God masterfully guides us.

And works in our life. And we should look forward to the future feast that we have with the lamb as his bride.

[21:57] And really believe that it's a real place that we're going to. We're really going to be there. If we are children of God we will really be there.

And we will see Jesus face to face. And it's a reality. It's not a story that we tell to make ourselves feel better. It's going to happen. So we should meditate on that more.

And think about it more. I was thinking that if I spent one minute every morning thinking about the hope I have in eternity. That would be a lot more than I do now. And I'm so focused on the reality of now.

But there's so much hope. And so much satisfaction to have ahead of us. So I'm going to close with that. And just really want to say that this psalm isn't just a nice idea.

It's so much more than that. It's true. And I hope we all can believe that. And put our faith in what it is teaching us.

[23:04] Thank you.