

Psalm 23-He Gives Me My Life Back!

Introduction:

1. Psalm 23 is part of the trio of Psalms that should be read and studied together (22, 23, 24)
 2. Of all the Psalms the 23rd is in the top 10 of the most famous and most memorized of all Psalms. It offers comfort, peace and gives us strength. David cried out in Psalm 22, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me!”, to “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...” in the 23rd Psalm.
 - a. This Psalm is known by several names:
 - b. The Shepherd’s Psalm
 - c. The Lord’s my Shepherd
 - d. The 23rd Psalm
 3. It is safe to say that most Christians know the Psalm and even think they understand the message. However, familiarity oftentimes breeds contempt.
 - a. Invite you to take a fresh look at the Psalm.
 - b. As we read the Psalm please take a look at your footnotes because some of our common translations have inserted words that are not in the original, thus making the Psalm mean something that it really was not intended to mean.
 4. This song has been in the music charts for over 3000 years! Talk about a hit!
- I. General observations about the Psalm
- A. King David was writing as sheep.
 1. True shepherds, pastors, elders, must realize that they are still sheep and part of the flock.
 2. The day the shepherds forget they are sheep is the day they no longer are God’s shepherds, that is the day they become dictators and domineering taskmasters who care about their appetites and not about the welfare of the sheep.
 3. Here King David sees himself as a helpless sheep in total dependence of the Lord his Shepherd.
 - B. Reality of the translations
 1. Nobody likes to have their allusions shattered, nobody likes to have their long held beliefs questioned.
 2. But we lose nothing in looking at the truth, but we gain a deeper understanding of the inspired word.
 - C. Two major myths:
 1. **This is not a Psalm for death or deathbed, it is for life!**
 - a) I know that this a favorite for funerals and when people are terminally ill.
 - b) This has been done because of one word: “Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death.” But in the original Hebrew text the word “death” does not appear. The original text reads, “Even if I walk through a very dark valley...” or “Even though I walk through the darkest valley...”
 - c) This Psalm is to gives strength and comfort everyday of our life, not just at the end of life.
 - d) Also, the word “forever in verse 6 is not in the original Hebrew text, but the words, “as long as I live...” or “all the days of my life...”
 2. **This Psalm is for sheep and not for goats.**

- a) This might seem obvious, but here is the explanation:
 - (1) In the original Hebrew text the Psalm begins, “YAWEH is my Shepherd,” which means, “I AM is my Shepherd.”
 - (2) This means that The One True God is my Shepherd and His name is I AM. I AM means I have always since eternity been God. (“Tell them I AM sent you.”)
 - (3) The god of Islam is Allah and his name is “I am not,” because he has never been the eternal God, nor will he ever be.
 - (4) The god of the Indian Hindus is “I am not,” because he has never been the eternal God, nor will he ever be.
- b) This is a Psalm ONLY for the sheep who have a true relationship with the Shepherd, and not for the general public.
 - (1) This is a Psalm for the sheep who dwell in the house of the Lord forever and not just every once in a while, sporadically, just when it is convenient or when they have problems.
 - (2) That’s why this Psalm is for sheep and not goats.
- D. If you are going to be a sheep you have to:
 - 1. Admit that you are a sheep
 - a) Bible talks about foxes, wolves, bulls, lions, dogs-aggressive animals. But a sheep is meek, lowly and humble.
 - b) Until you admit that you are lowly and need help you cannot claim this Psalm.
 - c) Until you admit that you need protection, provision and a Shepherd to restore your soul, you cannot claim this Psalm.
 - 2. Confess that you have found the Shepherd
 - a) This Psalm is not for seekers but for finders: The Lord IS my Shepherd.
 - b) 5 Finger story in Wales.
- II. Decision: Verse 1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”
 - A. David decided to trust in God. A trusting sheep, one that has pinned its entire life and future in the hands of the Shepherd and not in its own hands.
 - B. I shall not have any need
 - 1. The word “want” does not mean wants like covetousness, but needs.
 - 2. The Lord is my Shepherd and cares for me as an individual, like a shepherd for his sheep; so that I’ll never lack anything that I really need.
 - 3. The promise is not the He will give me everything that I want, but that I will be taken care of and that my needs will be met.
 - C. The whole world of economics and capitalism would be turned upside down if we learned to be content with our needs instead of our wants. The eye never tires of seeing, the greedy heart never becomes content with wanting.
- III. Dependence: Verse 2 “He makes me lie down in green pastures...”
 - A. The responsible shepherd scouts out the land, makes plans and knows exactly where the green pastures and still waters are located.
 - B. There must be balance between eating and resting, drinking and activity
 - 1. After eating the sheep must rest, this rest comes at noon when it is the hottest (Song of Solomon 1:7)
 - 2. After drinking at still waters it is time to continue the journey.
 - C. Our Shepherd knows when to move us and when to make us rest. Left to our own devices we will work to our own demise.
- IV. Development: Verse 3: Energy-Restores my soul (life)
 - A. This means that He puts life in me again
 - B. He leads me in the paths of righteousness (tracks of righteousness)
 - 1. When you drive sheep they will instinctively choose the wide path. The Shepherd has to force the sheep to take the narrow path, because it is the safest path.
 - 2. The Shepherd will make sure the sheep will go on the safest path for His reputation as the good Shepherd.

- V. Defense: Verse 4: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley."
- A. Life is not all hilltops, a sheep has no insurance, not defense, no fangs, no claws, to fight against its enemies.
 - 1. The critical times for the sheep were early mornings and late nights when the shadows were thick and dark, when beasts were lurking for a meal.
 - 2. The Bible never promises an easy passage.
 - 3. The valley of deep darkness is not the valley of death, it is not at the end of life, but during life that we encounter critical moments and evil.
 - B. A rod and a staff are of no use to a dying sheep, but to a living one!
 - C. Two things give a sheep courage: The presence of the Shepherd and his weapon
 - 1. A rod (club) to club the enemy on the head
 - 2. A staff (crook) to grab the sheep by the neck if it is straying.
- VI. Delight: Verse 5: "You prepare a table before my enemies"-Being treated like a shepherd by a Shepherd
- A. Three things a host did for a guest:
 - 1. Best meal
 - 2. Anointed the head
 - 3. Given a drink (here the cup is being filled to the brim and over the brim) A gesture meaning "I will give you all I can."
 - B. He did this in front of the enemies, setting a table with the best meal possible, smoothing his hair down and filling his cup to the brim, and the wolves, bears, jackals and the screeching hyenas surrounding. But the guest fears not harm, no evil all the days of his life, as long as he is in the house of the Lord-**all the days of his life.**
 - C. This is how you feel when you come out of the valley of the shadow of darkness, out of the gorge to gorge yourself.
- VII. Destiny: Verse 6: "...all the days of my life..."
- A. Looks forward to two things:
 - 1. Peaceful days-all the days of my life, the peaceful ones and the dark ones
 - a) Sheep instinctively are skittish and run at any noise.
 - b) Only goodness and mercy will chase me, not fear.
 - 2. And I will never be without a home, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."
 - B. You may not have a house, but you will never lack a home.

Conclusion:

- 1. Unbelievers only come to visit the Lord from time to time, when there is an emergency.
- 2. Believers live in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives.
- 3. The rest of the Five Finger Conclusion
- 4. Lord's invitation

The only God who really exists, the God of the Jews, cares for me as an individual, like a shepherd for his sheep; so that I'll never lack anything that I really need. He forces me to rest, where there is abundant nourishment; then he moves me on, making sure I have constant refreshment. He puts new life into me when I'm exhausted. He keeps me on the right track, to maintain his good reputation. Even if I travel through a deep dark ravine, where danger lurks in the shadows, I'm not afraid of coming to any harm, because you are right there beside me. With your club to guard and your crook to guide, I feel quite safe. You lay the table for me, in full view of my helpless foes; you treat me as an honored guest and put on a lavish spread. For the rest of my days nothing will chase after me – except your generous and undeserved kindness and I'll be at home with this God, as long as I live.