

Comfort

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[0 : 00] Last week we looked at Psalm 19 and we saw that we have in creation and in God's Word in the Bible a double self-revelation of God.

So God reveals Himself to us through the world and through the Word. And tonight we're in Psalm 23. Now most of you will know this psalm.

It's kind of the John 3.16 of the Old Testament. Even if you didn't really grow up going to church, everyone pretty much knows this psalm. You'll see it on coffee mugs and posters with sunrises and little lambs and that kind of thing.

I think every funeral I've taken at Holy Trinity, someone has requested Psalm 23 either to be read or sung. There's a hymn called the 23rd Psalm.

So it's a really familiar psalm, but I'm hoping that God reveals something new to us or brings some sort of fresh insight tonight as we look at this great psalm.

[0 : 56] And I found it really a real blessing this week to be studying Psalm 23. Because if you're like me, if you like theology and you live in the world of ideas and you like to speculate about God and you like to put things in categories, then you might have a view of God that is very mechanical and sort of makes God a bit of a process rather than a relational, personal, benevolent person.

And this psalm kind of puts that right. It reveals God to be a personal, benevolent, loving shepherd who cares for us and comforts us.

That's who God is. So I've really been blessed. I hope that you are tonight. Tonight I'm going to talk about God as our shepherd in terms of his provision, in terms of his protection and in terms of his promise.

Provision, protection and promise. Okay. So let's pray and then we'll get to work. All right. Let's let's bow our heads. Father, thank you so much for the 23rd Psalm.

I pray that you would sweep away any over familiar reality that we might have with this Psalm that kind of numbs us to hearing from you tonight. But I particularly pray for my brothers and sisters who are going through hard times, that you would comfort them with the words of this Psalm.

[2 : 20] So please speak loudly and clearly now in Jesus name. Amen. Part of my research this week in looking at the 23rd Psalm is to do a bit of research on shepherds.

I don't know if you know any shepherds, but I don't. They're not really common these days. They are still common, though, in the Middle East. And particularly I was looking at shepherds called Bedouin shepherds.

They're common in Israel and that kind of Middle Eastern area. And they're really fascinating, fascinating people, these Bedouin shepherds.

I learned that they have such an intimate relationship with the sheep that they tend to. And in a couple of ways, some of the really interesting kind of facts about these shepherds.

One thing I found was that when these shepherds, these Bedouin shepherds are sleeping overnight with their flocks out in the field, the sheep will be kind of huddled together.

[3 : 24] And if the shepherd walks through the midst of them during the night, they won't stir at all. And yet if someone else walks through in exactly the same way, they'll kind of be up like a shot and really alarmed.

They know their shepherd that well. They know his footsteps. And they're secure in the midst of his oversight and protection.

In a similar kind of way, in these desert areas, there'll be waterholes here and there. And all of the shepherds and their flocks come together to this one waterhole.

So there should be a bit of a problem with these flocks of sheep mingling and getting mixed up. But apparently there isn't any issue because when the shepherd decides that it's time to leave, he kind of just calls them.

A bit like in John 10, we heard that Georgie read that Jesus is the good shepherd calls his sheep by name and they follow him. And apparently it's this exact same thing that the shepherd either calls or whistles and all of his sheep will just follow him out.

[4 : 29] They never have to worry about getting mixed up with the sheep. They know him that well. So when the psalmist, when he refers to God as being his shepherd, the Lord is my shepherd, he's making a really intensely intimate statement about who God is, what kind of God he is.

That he knows us that well, that he cares for us that much, that he loves us that intensely. So it's an intensely personal, intimate psalm.

So let's take a look at it. You just make sure you've got your Bible open and we're going to start verse 1 to 3. It says this, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. I heard this psalm a lot when I was younger and I remember thinking, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Does that mean that I won't want anything? That I'll have everything I want if I'm a Christian? As you know, that's not what it means. To say that I shall not want doesn't mean that I don't lack anything.

[5 : 42] I lack lots of things that I want. A Ferrari, for instance. I definitely lack a Ferrari at this point in time.

Working on a raise, but they're probably not going to happen for me in the near future. So I lack a Ferrari. But it's not talking about lacking anything in that sense, is it?

It's saying we don't want for anything that we need. That if we have the Lord as our shepherd, we don't lack for anything that we need. Do you believe that?

Do you agree with that? Do you have everything you need because God is your shepherd? Think about it.

Let me give you some scripture to back up the psalmist here. Psalm 84, 11 says, No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

[6 : 40] Another translation says, No good thing does the Lord withhold from the upright man. Another translation says, From the righteous one.

Now, as Christians, we know that when we become believers, God gives us the righteousness of Christ. So we can say, yes, we are righteous people, we who believe in Jesus.

So we read Psalm 84, 11 and it says, No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who are righteous. Do you believe that? As a righteous person. As someone with the righteousness of Christ.

Paul says in the New Testament, Philippians 4, 19, he says, My God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

My God will fully satisfy every need of yours. Do you believe that? It's true.

[7 : 47] You have the Lord as your shepherd. You worship Jesus and you will lack nothing. Nothing good. Let's keep going.

He says there at the end that he leads us beside still waters. He restores our soul and he leads us in right paths for his name's sake.

We saw this last week as well that if we have the correct kind of biblical worldview and understanding of where we fit into the universe, we'll see that God does everything primarily for his name's sake.

Another way of saying it is he does everything for his glory, for his own purpose, that in this psalm, God provides for us for his benefit.

We lack nothing good. We're provided with everything we need, but it's all for his sake. He does it for his glory.

[8 : 53] It's all about him. You look at right throughout the Bible, every big event, every small event.

Let's focus on the big events of the Bible, the exodus out of Egypt. Why did God do that? Yeah, to save his people from slavery, but primarily for his name's sake, so that they would worship him in the promised land.

Why did Jesus go to the cross? Yeah, it was to save us from our sins, but primarily it was for God's name's sake. It was so that we would worship him for eternity.

God does everything he does for his name's sake, and we get the benefit, but he gets the glory. I love it how he says, verse 3, He restores my soul.

He talks about walking in green pastures and lying down by still waters. He restores my soul. Do you have that kind of relationship with God?

[10 : 03] I mean, have you ever even asked God to do this, to restore your soul? There is an epidemic at the moment in our society of anxiety and depression.

And I know that it's a complicated issue. Believe me, I know. But I just wonder, how many of us experience deep depression or deep anxiety and never ask God to restore our soul, to comfort us, to mend us?

I want to challenge you tonight. If you're in this situation, and if you're not, then you will be at some point.

when you're going through hard times, ask, and it will be given to you. No good thing does God withhold from those who walk uprightly.

He restores our soul. So maybe I'm off the mark when I get up here and think, there's a bit of heaviness in the room.

[11 : 16] But if I'm not, if you're in that situation, pray tonight. Come and pray with us tonight. Pray that God would restore your soul. He's that kind of God.

Let's keep moving. Verse 4, we're going to talk about, that was the provision of God.

Let's talk about the protection of God. Verse 4, Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I like the old translation, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Remember as a kid, my mum, on her side of the bedroom, on the wall, above the bed, was this plaque. And it just had those words, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

And I remember as a kid, quite often, waking up in the middle of the night, having had another nightmare, or wetting the bed again, I was that kid, and I would wake up stressed, and distressed, and I'd run upstairs, to my parents room, and jump into bed with them, and I would just look across, and I can vividly see, this plaque on the wall, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

- [12 : 42] And they had taught me well, to know, that that was God, my shepherd, who would comfort me. See, God's the kind of shepherd, who not only provides for us, but he has a rod, and a staff, to protect us.

Shepherds are pretty rough characters. They needed to deal with, all kinds of, all kinds of situations.

Not only did they sleep outside, in the elements, but they also needed to protect their sheep, from wild animals. The point that this was written, there were bears, and lions, at large, in the Middle East, right, and sheep, don't have a lot, to protect themselves.

And so, shepherds needed to be, the kind of guys, who could handle, a bear. Who could handle, a sheep with thief.

They needed to have, those kind of weapons, and the kind of courage, to take on, that kind of adversity. And God is like that. He's that kind of God. He's that kind of tough guy, rod, staff, protective, kind of shepherd.

- [14 : 01] He protects us. You'll notice in verse 4 as well, I never noticed until this week, but he switches, how he refers to the shepherd. In the first three verses, he's been talking about you.

And here he switches, sorry, he's been talking about he. The Lord is my shepherd. He, he, he. Now he switches to you. It's a more personal, reference to God. You are with me.

Your rod, and your staff, they comfort me. What I think he's getting at here, is a, is a universal Christian experience. And that is, that when we're in, the dark valleys, when we're in the valley, of the shadow of death, it's then, that we feel closest to God.

It's then, that he proves to us, how close he is. See, when we're in the, the green pastures, when we're beside the still waters, it's so easy to, to focus on the fact, that we're in green pastures, that we're by still waters, that everything's good in life, to neglect, the shepherd.

When we're in green pastures, we talk about God. When we're in the dark valleys, we talk to God. So it's in the, the valley of the shadow of death, in the darkest valley, that God becomes, personal, and close.

- [15 : 32] He goes from being he, to being you. If you talk to people, who have lived in, in countries, where they've undergone persecution, for being Christians, they will tell you that.

They feel sorry for us, that we don't have the kind of, close relationship with God, that they do, because they've been driven to it, while we get fat, in the green fields.

I think our tendency, is to think that, when we're in the green pastures, God is with us, and when we're in the darkest valleys, he's abandoned us. Is that right?

Have you ever felt like that? Things are going well, God must be blessing me, he must be close to me. Then when we get into, the dark valleys, we think, what has God done? Why has he left us? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But notice something here. Verse 3, says that God leads us, through green pastures. The very next verse, verse 4, even though I walk, through the darkest valley, I fear no evil.

- [16 : 38] Why? For you are with me. God is still with him. God is still with us, in the dark valleys. And indeed, as I've said, I think, he becomes, all the more, real to us.

All the more, close to us. Or perhaps, we finally see, how close he really is, when we hit those dark spots. When we undergo, that suffering.

When we get back, the blood test, and we've got leukemia. When our baby dies, the dark valleys, God is with us.

let's look at this final one. I want to talk about promise. We've seen God's provision, his protection.

Let's talk about promise for a second. Verse 6, he says, Surely, surely, goodness, and mercy, shall follow me, all the days of my life, and I shall dwell, in the house of the Lord, my whole life long.

[17 : 44] I like the old version again. I will dwell, in the house of the Lord, forever. Forever. Surely, goodness, and mercy, shall follow me, all the days of my life, and I shall dwell, in the house of the Lord, forever.

I'm going to tell you, to the original readers, of this psalm, the Israelites, this would just, have been mind blowing. To think that they could dwell, in the house of the Lord, forever.

That was something, that only the high priest, could do. To dwell, in the house of the Lord, and then, to go into God's presence, was only something, that the high priest, could do, if he was chosen, and it was only then, could be done, once in a lifetime.

To dwell, with God, in his house. So, he is saying here, surely, this will happen to him, and it won't just be for a day, and it won't just be for a festival, it will be, forever.

And I think, what he is doing here, is looking forward, he is looking forward, to that day, when the Messiah will come, when he will bring, God's people, to be with God, to be with him, in his house, forever.

[19 : 04] And we can see, with the benefit of, hindsight, looking back, to the cross, we can see, that this was fulfilled. Jesus came, the Messiah did come, he died, as the Lamb of God, who was slaughtered for us, to bring us, to be with God, to secure the promise, that we will dwell, in the house of the Lord, forever.

This has all happened, for us, done by him, on our behalf. So, you heard in the New Testament, reading tonight, Jesus, refers to himself, as, the good shepherd.

he fulfills, Psalm 23, when you hear, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, you're meant to hear, Jesus, is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Even though, I've walked, through the darkest valley, the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus, is with me. His rod, and his staff, they comfort me. And because of what Jesus, did for me, I will dwell, in the house of the Lord, forever.

I just want to read you, a couple of quotes, from Jesus, from John 10. You heard them earlier, I just want to go back over them. Listen to what he says. Think about Psalm 23, and how it perfectly, links in, with what Jesus says, about himself here.

[20 : 27] He says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd, lays down his life, for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life, for the sheep.

For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down, of my own accord.

I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I receive this command, from the Father. That is, the good shepherd, the great shepherd. Do you know him?

Do you know him, like those sheep, know their shepherds, in the Middle East? Do you know him, like Jesus says, his sheep will know him? They'll know him, by name.

Psalm 23 provides us, with such a beautiful picture, of who God is.

[21 : 39] Are you like me, and you've kind of made God, into this cold mechanical process, over the years? As you've gotten to know, more theology, and you've gotten more, into God's word, have you reduced him, down to a set of principles, or attributes, or processes?

Because that's not, who God is. God is alive. He's a person, and he's personal.

He's the good shepherd, who knows his sheep, by name. He provides for them, he protects them, he makes promises, to them, and he fulfills, all of the promises, he makes.

Said last week, that you won't understand, God's world, or his word, unless you understand, Jesus, the word made flesh. And it's exactly the same, with this psalm. So many people, around the world, know it by heart.

So many people, around the world, have it on posters, on their wall, as a kind of, a motivational thing. But you won't understand, the Lord is your shepherd, unless you know, Jesus, the good shepherd.

[22 : 48] And if you know, Jesus, the good shepherd, then you can take, great comfort, from this psalm. God proved, that it was true, when he sent Jesus, the good shepherd, to also be the lamb, who was slain.

God proved, his provision for you, by providing, a lamb to be slaughtered, in your place. He proved, his protection of you, by providing a lamb, who would guarantee, your place in eternity.

And he proved, his promise to you, by being true, to his word, in sending a Messiah, who would bring you, back into relationship, with God.

All of that, all of that, is true, of the good shepherd.

So then, I want to speak to you again, particularly those of you, who are struggling, in life right now. I mean, we know each other, right?

[24 : 15] I get to speak with, many of you, every week. We sit down, and we talk, and some of the stories, are horrific. Some of the circumstances, are, are intense.

Some of the hurt, is very deep. We can talk about, ways to deal, with suffering, and methods, to deal with hurt.

But tonight, God has revealed to us, a good shepherd, who will restore, our soul. Remember Jesus' own words, he said, come to you, all, who are, burdened, and are heavy laden.

Do you feel that way? Do you feel that way? come to me, come to me, all, who are burdened, and heavy laden, and I, will, give, you, rest.

I'm the good shepherd, and I'll give you rest. I want to commend, that good shepherd to you, and the best way, I can do that, is to pray to him, on your behalf, and ask for his help.

[25 : 37] So, let's bow our heads, I'll pray for us. Father, Father, Father, I feel just, that I'm carrying, a lot of the weight, of suffering, that's in this room, right now.

Lord, we live in a sinful world, it's a disease ridden world, it's a world, in which, all kinds of, hurt comes our way, relationships break down, babies are miscarried, terminal illness, is afflicted, upon us, and sometimes, it just feels like, it all becomes, a little too much, that we're burdened, and heavy laden, we have the world, on our shoulders, the darkness, will not lift.

We thank you, that you are a personal, loving, benevolent, close, compassionate, God. That you are a shepherd, to us.

That you are with us. That you are with us, in the green pastures, and you are with us, in the valley, of the shadow, of death.

So I pray, for my brothers, and sisters, and I pray, for those who don't know you, and I pray, that they would know, your love, your compassion, your closeness.

[27 : 25] Father, please prompt us, in these tough times, not just to lament, but to come to you, and to plead with you, to restore our souls, to ease our burdens, to give us rest.

Lord, please also, use us, as a church, to bear one another's burdens, to pray without ceasing, that we would practice, true religion, as we look out, for one another, and love one another.

Thank you for this psalm, thank you for a, reminder tonight, of who you are, and what you've done for us. We love you Lord, we love you so much.

Thank you Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.