OUR GREAT SHEPHERD
PSALM 23

INTRODUCTION: This psalm is probably the most well-known gem of all the Bible. It has dried many tears, and has comforted many hearts.

This psalm never loses its applicability; its practicality will never be exhausted. As long as men (like sheep that wander) are in need of guidance, protection, and provision, they can find it in the Great Shepherd.

"The Lord is my shepherd" = lit. "Yahweh is the one shepherding me" (active participle - shows continuing action). Our Shepherd never abandons His sheep. READ John 10:9-15.

"I shall not want" - "a simple and perfect expression of calm faith in God's providence" (Cohen, p. 67). I shall never lack that which I need.

We will never go without direction (v. 2-3), security (v. 4), or provisions (v. 5-6).

This psalm follows the similar pattern of Psalm 16:11 - "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." - path (v. 2-3), presence (v. 4), pleasures (v. 5-6).

PROPOSITION: ALL THAT WE NEED (AND MORE) IS OURS IN OUR GREAT SHEPHERD. (we would be fools not to follow our Great Shepherd).

3 Reasons:

I. HIS PATH IS BEST (v. 2-3)

(Where God leads us, we should follow)
Our Shepherd meets our need for direction, because He is our Guide.

A. OUR SHEPHERD GUIDES US WITH THOUGHTFULNESS.

"Green pastures" = lit. "pastures of tender grass." When the hot sun is up, a thoughtful shepherd leads his flock to cool meadows or shaded areas. God always has our best interest in mind!

"Still waters" = lit. "waters of restfulness." The word "still" refers to a quiet, calm, resting place.

God leads to streams where rest can be found.

Contrast this idea to where Satan leads: confusion, noise, disorder, chaos. "There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked."

B. OUR SHEPHERD GUIDES US WITH TENDERNESS.

"Leadeth" = the Hebrew word ( ) describes a gentle, careful guidance as opposed to a forceful driving (EX: how prisoners are treated; EX: how military drives.

The word is used in the sense of helping one along; or leading carefully.

EX: Is. 40:11 - "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

EX: Poem "Footprints in the Sand"

"A guide-post is one thing; a Guide is quite another" (Jowett, p. 39).

God not only tells us where to go - He brings us there.

"He restores ( ) my soul" = He makes my soul return to its former condition. He gives refreshment! There are times when our soul is troubled, distressed, thirsty, etc., and God brings us back to a state of calmness, health, and satisfaction.

EX: how when you are thirsty (because of a loss of liquids) you must have the water replaced (so all things return to normal).
God wants to refresh your tired and exhausted soul.

C. OUR SHEPHERD GUIDES US TOWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS.

NOTE: The right way; not necessarily an easy way. (He leads in paths that are right in His eyes).

This road is often tedious, long, and dust-filled, but it is right!

NOTE: we are no longer lying down (v. 2), but are walking, walking, walking. Our spiritual growth needs those times of ease (in green pastures), but we also need those times of toil and difficulty (cp. v. 4). It will not always be a bed of roses.

We need a combination of green pastures (v. 2) and dark valleys (v. 4) so that we can see God's hand in it all!

The Lord will never lead you to do something wrong (against his word).

When we go astray and then face the consequences for it, we must not blame God.

EX: of how a shepherd would sometimes have to break the leg of a sheep to keep it from wandering astray into real danger.

"For His name's sake" = not merely for our sake. Sure, God is interested in our personal welfare, but He guides us into righteousness to uphold His own honor, reputation, and holiness.

When we sin, we disgrace God's name.

God's blessings are for His own glory ("for his name") (Ezek. 20:36).

The world is saying: "Come this way, go that way, etc." But God's path is best!

Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me . . ." (Jn. 10:37ff).

Song - "Where He leads me I will follow."

II. HIS PRESENCE IS COMFORTING (v. 4)

(Because God is with us, we should not fear)
Our Shepherd meets our need for security, because He is our Guard.

A. GOD IS WITH YOU.

"Shadow of death" = death's darkness. The word is a compound of ( ) darkness and ( ) death.

We all go through deep, dark valleys (JOKE: In NY, you may go through some deep, dark alleys!)

In the land of Israel, the sheep were often led into some deep ravines (in search of water, etc.) and in those dark, tight areas lurked many wild beasts. The possibility of being suddenly attacked always existed.

EX: David protected his flock by killing a lion and a bear with his own hands (I Sam. 17:33-37).

"God's companionship is not conditioned by the nature of the road" (Jowett, p. 40). (EX. of some friends who will depart when the road gets tough).

God wants to show his presence all the more in those rough situations.

Remember, you are never alone! If you have Christ.

Sometimes it may appear in life that the Devil appears to be more powerful than God (when evil surrounds us), but God is there!
"The darkness and the light are both alike to God!" (Ps. 139). You are not hidden, you are not alone.

B. GOD IS WITH YOU TO PROTECT YOU FROM DANGER ("ROD")

"Your rod" = a weapon of defense, a club with which to drive off the beasts of prey which attack the sheep (cp. Ps. 2:9 - Jesus will destroy his enemies with a rod of iron when He comes back!).

C. GOD IS WITH YOU TO KEEP YOU FROM STRAYING INTO DANGER ("STAFF")

"Your staff" = a stick that the shepherd would lean on when resting, and would use to guide his sheep from straying away.
It is comforting to know that God will not allow His sheep to permanently wander off into devastating danger.

Song - "How Can I Fear?"

III. HIS PROVISION IS GENEROUS (v. 5-6)

(What God gives us should be fulfilling)

Our Shepherd meets our need for provisions, because He is our Giver.

The Shepherd is now portrayed as a host who feels obligated to meet the needs of his guest (cp. the protection Lot offered his guests - Gen. 19).

A. GOD'S GIVING MAKES US FEEL IMPORTANT

"Table . . . in the presence of mine enemies"

God always seems to make it evident to the lost as to how well He treats His own.

"God's goodness should lead to repentance." However, God's goodness (favor) often leads to jealousy (EX. Cain and Abel).

"If God be for us, who can be against us?"

B. GOD'S GIVING MAKES US FEEL REFRESHED

"Anointest my head with oil"

In Jesus day, a good host would: 1) wash feet; 2) greet with a kiss; 3) anoint his head with oil (cp. Lk. 7:44-46); and 4) would provide a meal for the guest.

The anointing with oil would greatly refresh the weary traveler.

C. GOD'S GIVING MAKES US FEEL SATISFIED

"My cup runneth over"

God is not cheap, or stingy; and He doesn't care about getting the table cloth wet!

He wants to fully care for his guest.

God is a conservative in His politics, but He is liberal in how much He gives!

The grace of the Lord does not just balance the necessity and leave nothing over.

Sometimes God will give "Just enough" - most of the time, however, we get ar more than we need --- "Pressed down, shaken together, and running over"

Examples of God's overflowing generosity:

1)His grace is over our sin - nothing seemed bigger than our sin (seemed like Mount Everest). If we tried to remove our sin [which was like a mountain], it would be like removing a mountain shovel-full by shovel-full. "Where sin aboundeth, grace doth much more abound." "We are more than conquerors through Him that loves us."

2) His provision is over our need - After feeding 5,000, 12 baskets full remained. EX: the prodigal son (in remembering his father), said: "In my Father's house, there is bread enough and to spare."

David saw himself as not merely a guest for a day, but forever!

"Goodness" = God will provide for your physical welfare.

"Mercy" = God will faithfully show you His loving kindness as He protects you.

"Dwell in the house of the Lord" = Temple, where God dwelt in O.T.

CONCLUSION: We lack nothing with our Shepherd - He keeps us well-directed, well-protected, and well-satisfied.

Why should we go astray? Why should we fear? Why should we complain?

We have no reason not to follow our Shepherd.

Our Great Shepherd guides us to what is good for us; He guards us from what will harm us, and He gives us more than we can imagine!

1. His path is best
2. His presence is comforting
3. His provision is generous

He who denies that Christ is the good Shepherd who giveth His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11); he who is unsaved has no right to say "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

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7/12/98

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(Because God is with us, we should not fear)
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B. GOD IS WITH YOU TO PROTECT YOU FROM DANGER (*"ROD"*)

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B. GOD'S GIVING MAKES US FEEL REFRESHED
"Anointest my head with oil"

C. GOD'S GIVING MAKES US FEEL SATISFIED
"My cup runneth over"

D. GOD'S GIVING MAKES US FEEL SECURE (V. 6)
"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

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