

Following the Shepherd's Path

Psalm 23

7/28/2017

PW Emerson - Ten:27 Ministries

We're doing a series on Psalms this summer

- First week we looked at Psalms 1 – about the blessings God has for us
- Second week we look at Psalm 119:105 – how God's Word is to guide us
- Third week we look at Psalm 122 – about worshipping with excitement!
- Last week we looked at Psalm 84 – the Valley of Baca

Today, the most well-known Psalm, Psalm 23.

Psalm 23:1-4

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He leads me along paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴Even 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

This is undoubtedly the most well-known Psalm.
It is on many t-shirts, posters, paintings and more.

But to get the most out of it we really need to understand the

- Historical context
- And Geography

Where was David when he wrote Psalm 23?

- Hiding from King Saul
- Most likely in a cave, overlooking a wadi

What is a wadi?

- a canyon

Keep in mind this is in the desert.

When the rains finally do come in a desert environment, it is often quick and power storms – colliding fronts.

It gives a tremendous amount of water in a short time so much so that in a canyon, it is often flooded

Shepherds would often be in the bottom of a canyon to feed their flock.

Why? Because in the bottom or valley, that is the last place that water flows out of.

As a result, you have a higher chance of finding vegetation in the valley – and that’s why shepherds go there to feed the flock.

But ... what would happen to a shepherd in a valley when the deluge of rain comes?

- People get trapped & killed by the running water

For a shepherd, feeding his flock in a valley, knowing rains may come, wouldn’t it be helpful to know a safe close-by way out?

- On the sides of the canyons, the hills were covered with very small trails
- The trails are called “Paths of righteousness” – PICTURE
- A better translation would be something to the effect of “Paths of safety”

So ...

David is sitting in a cave on the side of a wadi / canyon

Although he is hiding from King Saul, who is trying to kill him,

David expresses his love and joy for God by writing a poem – Psalm 23
He uses the shepherd analogy because David is a former shepherd

David relied on God to lead him to safety. Thus, he wrote:

He leads me along paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

⁴Even 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.

Psalm 23:3b-4

As David expressed how he felt about God he used what he knew.

Thus, he compared being a shepherd of a flock to how God tends his flock.

What about you?

How do you express how you feel about God?

Do you write poetry about God?

Do you draw/paint artwork about God?

Do you write music about God?

If you don't do anything to express how you feel
about God, you should change that.

The comfort or contentment David felt being in God's care was more than physical.

It was also spiritual and emotional comfort.

David knew he was completely safe in every way when in God's care

Again, we see the aptness of the shepherd metaphor

Therefore, Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

John 10:7

When sheep were in their pen sleeping at night, the shepherd WAS the door.

(PICTURE)

The shepherd would keep the sheep in where it is safe.

AND the shepherd would keep others out!

Shepherds in the middle east still do the same today!

In the same way, David sees God as the door for us – to be on the right path.

When the sheep need to get in, the shepherd leads the way.

- Not only do the sheep have access because of the shepherds showing the way,
- THE SHEEP ALSO RECOGNIZE THE VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD!

Are you recognizing the voice of the shepherd?

Are you recognizing the voice of Christ in your life? In the world?

The reverse is also true. If a thief were to jump over the fence at night, the sheep wouldn't recognize that voice and would run away!

Would you run from a voice leading you astray?

I THE SHEPHERD LEADS BY LOVE - BE LED BY LOVE

- John 10:11-15

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

- If you are doing something as a hired hand, you are less concerned and less motivated.
- What is our motivation?
- The Shepherd acts out of love

When moving cattle, like cowboys, they drive the sheep, pushing them from behind.

The shepherd doesn't drive the sheep, rather he is OUT IN FRONT, leading the way

- Aaron Feuerstein
 - CEO & Owner of Malden Mills in Massachusetts
 - Factory burned down in 1995
 - He used insurance money to rebuild
 - While rebuild was going on, he used his own money to pay the FULL salary of all 3000 workers – totally against typical CEO wisdom!
 - When asked why, he said he believed his study of the Talmud left no alternative
- Are you using love
 - At work?
 - With your speech?
 - With your acts?
 - With your face – with your smile?
 - With your family?
- When we follow love, we are much more motivated to love.
- What are you following?

Talk about being out in front leading, God sent his son to die for us before we knew we needed it!

And God continues to lead us on the right path still today!!

Years ago, I went on a tour of mammoth caves in Kentucky.

- Tour guides **LOVED** what they did.
- They spent their spare time exploring more caves and trying to understand them better
- They told us ALL KINDS of incredible things about the caves
- The tour guides brought us quite far underground, right next to very sensitive crystal formations
- They NEVER led us down the wrong path!
- Why? Because they LOVED what they did!

God is not going to lead us down a bad path. He loves the people he leads!

II CONTENTMENT IS ON THE PATH

- Look at King David – before he was king but after the David and Goliath incident.
 - King Saul wanted to KILL David.
 - David was on the run.
 - But David was content; he was following God and that was all he needed.
 - David found contentment on the path.
- What is David talking about with “green pasture?”

- Where there was green, there was food and water for the sheep.
- In the middle of a desert, it would be an oasis.

The “green pastures” is just what a shepherd needs to feed the sheep.

When David says, “He leads me lie down in green pastures,” he’s saying that God is providing for the resources he needs!

In our lives, we will have times when we are in a very difficult place under difficult circumstances.

- When that happens, God will lead us to an oasis, if we let him.
- God will provide for what we need.

He leads me beside still waters ...

- In counseling, one of the things we look at is what is people’s stress reliever?
 - For some people it is listening to music
 - For some people it’s making music
 - Maybe for you it’s riding a motorcycle and feeling the wind on your body
 - For me, it’s running ... and tinkering with computers.
 - What is YOUR “still waters?”

Staying near still waters FROM GOD helps us find contentment.

Illustration on Contentment, from *Our Daily Bread*, May 26, 1994

In the fifth century, a man named Arenius determined to live a holy life. So he abandoned the conforms of Egyptian society to follow an austere lifestyle in the desert. Yet whenever he visited the great city of

Alexandria, he spent time wandering through its bazaars. Asked why, he explained that his heart rejoiced at the sight of all the things he didn't need.

Those of us who live in a society flooded with goods and gadgets need to ponder the example of that desert dweller. A typical supermarket in the United States in 1976 stocked 9,000 items; by 1994 the average US supermarket carried 30,000. Today it's almost 40,000. How many of them are absolutely essential? How many superfluous?

We can be content with what God provides, without all the things of this world!

CONCLUSION

‘Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

There are two different words in Hebrew for the word “blessing.”

- One is a blessing of circumstances – if you exercise, eat healthy, get proper sleep, your body will last longer
- One is a hand from God

David, the writer of Psalm 23, is expressing the blessing of circumstances. But he's talking about the result of living *godly*, living according to God's direction

- Following God as your shepherd, your leader
- Not being afraid of things of this world because you're relying on God
- Work when God tells you to work
- Rest when God tells you to rest

When you do these things, you will be WITH GOD

And you will be at peace.

I don't know about during the time of David ... but in our world, in our culture, in our society today, finding people *REALLY* at peace is extremely rare.

People are worried about

- Finances
- Their kids
- Their future
- Their relationship with their spouse
- What happens when they mess up

We're worried about so many things that it's very hard to find people truly at peace.

If you follow the Lord as your leader, REALLY follow wherever that leads,
then

Goodness and mercy will follow you!