

## Psalm 23

Dear Friends in Christ,

Many of you are familiar with Psalm 139:16, “in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” What comfort to know that before birth God knew us and had mapped out our paths, in spite of the messes we make.

The words of Psalm 139 are comforting. At least they are until everything falls apart and gets real tough. We want to know where things are going, but often the answers are very hard to come by. Well, here's our comfort . . .

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD KNOWS

#### I. Because He Is the Shepherd.

So, who among us doesn't know and love the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm? And yet, who among us doesn't occasionally think that we are fulfilling our self-made blueprint for life? God's words, “the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” can quickly fade. And who among us doesn't fall apart when plans and dreams blow apart?

Well, here they are, the first three verses of our text:

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 paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

There's no question about it: God provides our needs but not necessarily our wants. This text implies that, but goes much, much further. The best commentaries on Psalm 23 are the words of Jesus Who, for starts, says, “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 lay down my life for the sheep.” (Jn. 10:14-15)

The Good Shepherd leads; takes us where we need to go but not necessarily where our flesh wants to go! The making us lie down in green pastures, the leading us beside still waters, the restoring our souls and the leading us in paths of righteousness are the forgiveness of sin, the mercy and love of God - the rest for our souls given to us through the Means of Grace; the Word and Sacraments. Lutheran commentator John F. Brug writes:

Our Good Shepherd nourishes and refreshes our bodies with wholesome food and refreshing drink, but the green pastures and quiet waters in this passage are the truths of the gospel which give spiritual life and peace to our souls. The comparison of God's word to food and drink occurs in all parts of Scripture. (John F. Brug, *Psalms I, People's Bible Commentary*, CPH, 1992, p. 113)

A wonderful example of this is given in John 6:35 when Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (Jn. 6:35) Through Isaiah God declared, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Is. 55:1)

#### II. Paths of Righteousness.

Everything that has been stated is connected to this truth: “He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” (3b) We spend a lifetime agonizing over our worldly well being. But, listen, the guidance for our worldly well being is always in front of us. The issue is whether or not we're listening.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on...For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt. 6:25a, 32-33)

The Lord will supply what we need of this world. However, above all things is His statement the “paths of righteousness” which stands far above all our worldly concerns and our personal sacrifices for them! The most important aspect of “the paths of righteousness” is tied to these words of Jesus: “I am the good shepherd...and (I) lay down my life for the sheep.” (Jn. 10:14-15) And He did that because the sheep are sinful and eternally lost because of sin. The Scriptures say, “But the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law (that is, the thinking we can keep the law and do what is necessary to earn God’s love)...The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” (Rom. 3:21-22)

It’s always the same, isn’t it? It doesn’t change, thankfully: The Good Shepherd gave His life in payment for our sin. We know we’re not going to hang on to this world forever. Calvary’s bloody Cross is the assurance of God’s forever and ever love! Heaven! Not earth! Paul writes of Abraham, “...his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness’....It will be counted to us who believe in him (Jesus) who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Rom 4:22-25) Justified. Not guilty of sin. And, as a result, takes us to these words of grand comfort:

### III. Through the Valley.

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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (vv. 4-6)

This is where we momentarily reside: a dark valley full of dying and death. The rod and staff are actually one item with two purposes; namely something on which one can lean in order to rest and also use to protect the sheep. Kretzmann writes that they are “the protecting and sustaining power of Jehovah’s mercy in the means of grace (Word and Sacrament)...offering the right consolation in every trouble affecting both body and soul.” (P. E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, Old Testament, Vol. II, CPH, P. 82)

The table prepared in the presence of our enemies reminds us that God doesn’t hide us from this world’s upheavals but leads and sees us through this world. Kretzmann notes that the anointing our heads is the ancient act “preceding the festival meal of old and assuring the most cordial welcome on the part of the host.” (Kretzmann, p. 82)

Again and again, He’s leading us through the turbulence and dying of this world. The unknowns. I pray that you are not tired of hearing the following words and applying them to life: “so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:7) Tested faith! Your faith and mine are and will be tested. The tests are not for God to make a discovery about us. They are for us to discover where our hearts and minds truly rest; either on the wants and death of this world - or on the greatest event of all . . .

### IV. The 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. (v. 6)

Is this clear to us? Christ didn't make the climb to Calvary to win earthly comfort for us. Granted, most Christians in this country live and have lived as if that's the main issue. But it isn't.

Jesus was very clear, and this needs to be very clear with us, namely this statement that should rule our understanding of life on this earth. "My kingdom is not of this world." (Jn. 18:36) He made that statement just prior to Pilate handing Him over to be crucified for our sins so that we would be citizens of Christ's Eternal Kingdom.

Sometimes I think we allow ourselves to get so distracted and caught up in our running because we know we have only one brief moment to be distracted and run till we hit the grave. This world has created a junkyard of distractions that smother the real issues and concerns of our brief, earthly lives, and the distractions have become fiercely destructive!

Sometimes I wonder if we're fearful that the other side won't be all that Scriptures say it is; that the promise of everlasting life and joy will be broken by regrets that we didn't get to climb the Himalayas, play in the water of the Mediterranean, stuff our tummies at the top restaurants and shop at every Mall in the country. Man, we've got problems!!

You wonder, don't you; what it's going to take for God to keep our spiritual attention? I believe we're deep into finding out! One thing for sure: **The Good Shepherd Knows** - loves us and will lead us in spite of how we see anything!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

*July 15, 2018*

*Psalm 23:*

## ***“The Good Shepherd Knows”***

*I. Because He Is the Shepherd.*

*II. Paths of Righteousness.*

*III. Through the Valley.*

*IV. The Forever.*

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