

The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

Introduction

1. Though this is a Psalm often associated with death, it really has nothing to do with death.
2. Rather it is a Psalm about life—a person's life as they put complete trust in the guidance and protection of the Lord as their shepherd.
3. Outlined:
 - a. Vs. 1-3: The provision of the Lord.
 - b. Vs. 4-5: The protection of the Lord.
 - c. Vs. 6: The Preservation of the Lord.

Discussion

I. The Provision of the Lord (vs. 1-3).

- A. The Lord is our shepherd (vs. 1).
 1. Not like English shepherd, But Hebrew shepherd (Ps. 78:52-53; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-16).
 2. Actively works with His sheep, watching, guiding, leading, protecting, caring for, and retrieving. This is our shepherd, the Lord God who watches over His people.
 3. This is the shepherd that the Psalmist describes in Psalm 23; this is the kind of faith we ought to have in the Lord.
- B. No lack of physical necessities (vs. 1-2).
 1. "I shall not want"
 2. There may be times when God's servants must get by with very little (Mark 1:6—John the Baptist).
 3. But never has there been nor never will there be a case where God allows one of His faithful to want to the point of despair.
 4. As with the shepherd, the ground may become scarce for food, but He always supplies the good ground in due time.
 5. The Lord sees all and knows where the good ground is and will lead us there in due time, and like sheep we must learn to trust in the Lord and not in our own limited wisdom.
 6. God has promised that He will care for all physical needs (Matt. 6:25ff).
- C. No lack of spiritual necessities (vs. 3).
 1. We see that the Lord cares for all of our physical needs. It should necessarily follow then that He will care for our spiritual needs. That He will restore our soul.
 2. So it is that when we learn to trust in the care of the Lord our souls will be at rest, knowing the peace of God (Phil. 4:6-7).
 3. He gives us His guiding words as spiritual food which, when we follow them as trusting sheep, we will be cleansed, restored, made whole and holy (Ps. 119:9).
 4. For He leads us in the paths of righteousness.
 - a. Ps. 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
 - b. 2 Tim. 3:16-17: "...that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

II. Protection of the Lord (vs. 4-5).

A. Valley of the shadow of death

1. The psalmist creates a picture of evening, as the shadows would begin to fall in the valleys of Palestine and the increasing danger of night-time predators.
2. Harm, even death, would begin to lurk in its midst: wolves, lions, other wild creatures and even thieves seeking to steal the sheep away would be an ever present danger.
3. In order for the sheep to reach their fold (enclosed pasture, place of protection—Isa. 65:10), they must pass through these areas where the shadows may seem to be as death.
4. Nevertheless, the good shepherd does not allow harm to befall His sheep in the midst of these shadows.
 - a. David told Saul of his fighting off bears and lions in order to protect his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-35).
 - b. Knowing from personal experience the comfort sheep can have when led by a good shepherd, David describes the Lord as such a shepherd.
 - c. For as a sheep in the flock, though David walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he feared no evil.
5. Such is the protection which God's people are promised, as the Lord battles the bears and lions while His people are led in protection (Rom. 8:31).
 - a. How do we know that the Lord protects us so?
 - b. As David put his life on the line for his sheep, so it is written of the Lord "...*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" (Rom. 8:32).
 - c. Do we not see that the Lord has not held back anything in order to care for His sheep?
 - d. Are we able to trust in the protection of the Lord as David did, to see that if the Lord was willing to offer His only begotten Son, surely He would not allow us to be laid waste by our enemies?
6. Therefore, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we can trust that the Lord is there, that He is fighting those enemies while leading us to His fold.
7. But we must trust in His might and in His guidance and not seek to leave His protection in the paths of righteousness, no matter how dire the situation may seem.

B. You are with me.

1. The Lord has promised that He will be with us always.
 - a. Such was the promise of Jesus in (Matt. 28:20).
 - b. Also Heb. 13:5, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*"
2. "*Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*"
 - a. This tool is both a rod to the enemy and a staff of guidance to the sheep.
 - b. From time to time a sheep would begin to wander in the wrong direction and the shepherd would give a gentle nudge in order to steer him in the way he ought to go.
 - c. This is not a nudge of hatred, but of tender love and care.
 - d. Though the sheep receives correction he is comforted in knowing that his shepherd is watching over him.
3. So too we can take comfort in the staff of our shepherd.
 - a. With what does the Lord lead us down paths of righteousness?
 - b. With what does the Lord gently nudge us in the way we ought to go?
 - c. It is with His word.
 - d. Therefore, when we are walking in the valley of the shadow of death, we can fear no evil for we take comfort in the guidance and protection of God's holy word.
 - e. This is the same word by which our enemies will be judged in the last day (John 12:48), so it is both a rod of correction and a staff of guidance.

4. As the Lord's sheep we must look to His staff for guidance in times of peace, but even more so while in the valley of the shadow of death.
 - a. Some would panic and leave His protection.
 - b. But we must take comfort in His presence and trust in His guidance.
 - c. Such describes the apostle Paul who was able to rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4), even while facing life threatening situations.

C. You prepare a table before me (vs. 5).

1. In summary, the Lord, as our shepherd, provides all that we need, as a table is prepared.
2. Though our enemies be all around us, they are without the blessings of the Lord.
3. He comforts us and heals our wounds.
4. He gives us in abundance so that we do not want (Matt. 7:11).

III. The Preservation of the Lord (vs. 6).

A. Surely goodness and mercy.

1. The Lord is for us, surely all good things will come to us.
2. His care is described as goodness and mercy.
3. With this, fellowship with the Lord grows out of a lifetime relationship with Him.

B. All the days of one's life.

1. The Lord will not leave us.
2. He does not desert us to our enemies, but is there always.
3. He is our guide and companion.

C. Dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

1. As sheep in his fold, so we shall also dwell in his house forever in His presence.
2. These are the things that will always accompany the faithful child of God.
3. No greater blessing could we ask than this!

Conclusion

1. As we conclude our study of this Psalm, it is fitting that we make some application, for a time is coming when Christians may become more and more aware of something like "the valley of the shadow of death."
2. The words of this Psalm must bring to our minds a great confidence in the protection of the Lord.
3. True protection can only be found in the Lord. Those who receive His protection are His sheep. His sheep are those who follow His guidance, even in the face of danger; who trust in His protection no matter the situation.
4. They are the ones who follow the path of righteousness in which He guides us. They are the ones who find comfort and guidance in His staff, which is the word of God.
5. Only when we are submissive and obedient to the Lord as sheep will we be able to fear no evil.
6. Therefore we must prepare our hearts and put all confidence in the Lord if we are going to stand firm in the right way.

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