

Psalms: The Songs of the People of God

A Psalm of the Sheep

Psalm 23

Sunday, April 8, 2018

Introduction

Of all the Psalms the 23rd Psalm may be the most well known – and for good reason. In these six verses David demonstrates how a confident trust in God can produce a blessed contentment.

At the heart of the Psalm is the truth that our God loves us and desires to give us rest, guidance, protection and blessing even in the darkest seasons of our lives - we have a good and faithful shepherd.

While David is the author of the Psalm it is written from the vantage point of a sheep. A sheep describes the nature and character of his Shepherd.

The Personal Nature of the Psalm (23:1)

- In the course of David's life he had two primary jobs – shepherd and king. Both of these positions required leadership that offered provision, protection and guidance, but the role of a shepherd is far more personal than that of a king. In this Psalm David wants us to feel the closeness of God. David says the Lord is MY shepherd.

The Promise: Because of the Good Shepherd We Lack Nothing (23:1b)

- In large part the rest of this Psalm flows out of the promise of vs.1: Since the Lord is the shepherd, the sheep lack nothing. This does not mean that the sheep have everything they desire, but they do not lack anything they need. David declares his confident trust and blessed contentment in God.

The Sheep Lack Nothing: The Shepherd is a Good Provider (23:2-3)

- **The Shepherd Provides Food and Water (23:2)** - One of the primary roles of a shepherd is to care for the physical needs of the sheep. The Shepherd of Psalm 23 doesn't just provide grass He provides green pastures. He doesn't simply provide water He provides water that is easy to drink.
- **The Shepherd Provides Rest and Renewal (23:2-3a)** – Sheep do not rest easily, they tend to be anxious and fearful. Because of the care of the Shepherd of Psalm 23 the sheep were able to lie down and be renewed. He fed them and protected them well, so they rested well.
- **Application:** We resemble sheep: we tend to be restless, fearful, anxious and discontent. The reminder is that our Shepherd is our provider. He provides for our needs and desires to give us rest from fear, worry and discontentment. Jesus spoke often of our need to trust Him (Matthew 6:25-34) and that He came to give us rest and peace (Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:27).

The Shepherd Provides Safe Direction (23:3b)

- While the common translation is '*paths of righteousness*,' in light of the metaphor it is best to understand that the shepherd guides the sheep in the '*right paths*.' Sheep are prone to wandering and straying into danger or unhelpful places but the shepherd keeps the sheep on the right paths.
- **Application:** We are like sheep. We want to go our own way, and usually our own way is not helpful. But we have a shepherd who will lead us in the right paths - the primary way He leads is through His Word.
- **For His Name's Sake** - The big idea of this Psalm is not for us to feel like really important sheep. The Shepherd is the main focus of the Psalm; He is the One who is faithful and trustworthy. All that He does for the sheep He does for His own glory and reputation.

The Sheep Lack Nothing: The Shepherd is a Good Protector (23:4)

- **The Shepherd Walks With the Sheep Through Dark Paths (23:4)** – While the Shepherd guides the sheep in the right paths, the right paths are not always the easy paths. Often the path goes through dark and dangerous places, but even then the sheep are in the care of the shepherd (He is present) and He is leading them (Psalm 139:7-12)
- **The Shepherds Protects the Sheep from Attacks and From the Dangers of Wandering (23:4)** - The Shepherd's rod is like a club and was used to fight off wild animals. His staff is a long walking stick with a hook that he could use that to pull in wandering sheep. The sheep feels safe knowing that the shepherd is prepared to handle any threat.
- **Application:** Our paths will not always be easy but we should find comfort in God's presence and protection. His rod is strong enough for any enemy and His staff can pull us close when we start to wander. (Romans 8:31-39)

We Lack Nothing: Our God is a Gracious Host (23:5-6)

- In verses 5-6 the metaphor changes but the point remains the same: Our God provides and protects and cares deeply for those who are His.
- In this picture God is a host and His people are His guests at a lavish feast. The anointing with oil is sign of honor and care for the guests and the full cup is a sign of good and kind provision. All the while the enemy waits at the gates but the guests are in the protection of the host.
- **Conclusion/Application:** Verse 6 provides a conclusion and final promise of the Psalm. God's pursues His children with His goodness and covenant faithfulness not only in this life but also in the life to come.

The Shepherd that Lays Down His Life for the Sheep – Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and He serves His people in the greatest way – He lays down His life to save His sheep (John 10:11-18).