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When the Lord is Your Shepherd...; Psalm 23
CEFC
3.16.14

Introduction – It's remarkable how v1 begins with such high elevated thought and yet each following phrase only builds from there. Higher and higher surges the thoughts of God's watchful, loving, provisional care over His children. Is it even possible to get above the thrilling solace of v1: "The Lord is my shepherd - how immeasurable the consolation of just that one thought, and yet it reaches further to the all-encompassing implication of that analogous descriptive of God's relation to His people with - "I shall not want." Sufficient would have been the comfort of this psalm had David set his pen down with just this one verse. Yet David sings forth truth after glorious truth until he reaches a crescendo of joyful exclamation, the point at which there is no higher place to go - "and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

I do believe that vv2-6 are essentially an unpacking of why David can issue such a statement that he shall not want if the Lord is his shepherd. And if these things be true for David, in Christ, these things be true of us as well. Let's make a few observations on v1 before we walk through the psalm.

1. "The Lord is my shepherd" is a faith-based, propositional truth only realized through faith. The Lord is not a shepherd to everyone, but He is the Great Shepherd to all who know Him. As Jesus says in John, "My sheep hear My voice, and they know Me, and they follow Me."
2. David says the Lord is "my" shepherd - "my" shepherd. Indicating the personal nature of our relation to God in Christ. One of the unique and dear truths of Christianity as opposed to all other religious expressions is that in Christ we enter into a personal relationship with Almighty God, such that it can be truthfully said that we know Him and He knows us.
3. David says, "The Lord is my shepherd" - indicating the kind of relation we have with God in Christ and the character of God. He is a shepherd to His people. David remembers his days as a shepherd, caring, watching, protecting, providing, and his love to do so. The Lord cares for His people in that way, just exponentially greater.
4. And then comes the implication of this extraordinary relation to God - "I shall not want." I shall not want because and only because the Lord is my shepherd. Under any other circumstance, I shall always want, I shall

always lack, I shall always be in need. But if this be true, if this be the case that the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 observations.

First, a complete trust and reliance upon God to be our full satisfaction for anything that lies ahead. Note the future connotation of I shall not want. No matter what I may face in this life, even death itself, of which David directly addresses, with the Lord as my shepherd, I shall not want. I shall find everything I need for wherever I am in Him. He's just that satisfying.

Second, let us note with extra care that David does not say "I shall not be in want" but rather "I shall not want." Psalm 23:1 is not prosperity Gospel teaching; it is rather real-life Gospel teaching. David is not saying that with the Lord as his shepherd, he will always have abundant health, wealth, and prosperity in this life. That he will never experience any emotional, physical, or material needs. We will never experience complete freedom from pain and trouble in this life, that is biblical truth. What David is saying here is that no matter what needs and struggles he may find in this life, he will always find God supremely sufficient and satisfying. He may be in want, he may be in need, but he shall not want anything more than what he has found in the Lord as his shepherd. And now he explains why.

I. He Completely Satisfies (vv1-3)

A) v2 - Note that He "makes" us lie down in green pastures. There's obvious control indicated there - He makes us do this. What are green pastures? They are the best, most comforting, most nutrient-filled pastures. He makes us lie down there, not over yonder in the arid, weed infested, nutrient-void ground. Why? Why does He make us lie down there? Because we, as sheep, are so easily prone to view rocky, dusty ground as green pastures. The old adage is so very true of our sinful nature, "The grass always looks greener on the other side." So God makes us lie down in green pastures.

1. He leads us beside still waters. He doesn't make here; He leads. He leads us to places of refreshment. He ensures that our hunger and our thirst are satisfied in the very best of places.

2. What are these green pastures and what are these still waters? Jesus said in Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

B) v3 - He restores my soul - Now He does that for us daily. Our souls get parched, dry, weary, and worn by sin, by circumstances, by weakened faith, by wayward and self-centered thought. General apathy

and spiritual numbness set in oh so very often and oh so very quickly. And He faithfully, constantly restores our soul. Cleanses, refreshes, makes new. There is no misery like soul misery. As Augustine so adequately stated, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

1. He leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He leads us to grow in Christ, to deepen the roots of our faith in Him, to desire and pursue holiness. He leads us in these paths for His name's sake. That's the one God-centered descriptive in this entire psalm. The rest of the psalm describes what God does for His children. This one little phrase tells us why. For His name's sake.

a. Misreading the God-centeredness of God has caused many believers to become agitated with God and many unbelievers to reject God.

b. If you read this phrase through a God-centered lens, you see the beauty and joy and comfort that it brings. Namely, if God loves you and cares for you and saves you for His name's sake that only means He loves you and cares for you and saves you in the highest, most glorious, most joyful ways to be loved and to be saved. If it's for His name's sake, it will not fail!

II. He Never Fails (v4)

A) Note how he moves from present to future, vv2-3 describing how God is presently caring for him and v4 looking by faith into the future for how God will care for him. And he is looking at what he knows will be his greatest challenge - death - and he is declaring with full assurance that God will be good and God will be faithful to him to such a degree that death will not be death.

1. David says he will walk through the valley of the shadow of death, not death, but only death's shadow. In other words, because Christ has defeated death and because in Christ we are rescued from eternal death, the believer experiences only a shadow of it. The Bible refers to the death of believers as falling asleep. You merely fall to sleep to this life only to awaken to life everlasting. It's just a shadow.

2. I will fear no evil - I will not fear the loss of salvation, I will not fear undergoing judgement, I will not fear that faith was meaningless, I will not fear any evil - why? because You are with me!!!

3. Death can be the loneliest valley one will ever walk because you walk through it individually - however, for the believer, we will not walk through it alone. That's a comfort my friend. That's the greatest comfort for the greatest trial. A believer may die all alone in a hospital room but he will never face death alone!

4. Then David says the reason God's presence will drive away any fear is because His rod and His staff brings him such comfort. What is this rod and staff? Some commentators suggest that rod and staff refer to God's discipline and care for the sheep. There's truth to that. A shepherd had many uses for his rod and his staff. But in regard to surpassing comfort in death, why does David rejoice in the rod and staff of God? Well the rod was used to count the sheep one by one as they passed under it, ensuring that the shepherd did not lose not even one of his sheep because he kept count of his flock. The shepherd's staff was his weapon against any enemy that approached the flock. So David says, "I will not fear".

III. He Abundantly Blesses (vv5-6)

A) v5 - we go back to the present. Your grace is above and beyond what I can even ask. I don't just skirt by my enemies, I feast before them. I'm not just rescued, I'm anointed. My cup is not half full; it's overflowing. You place me under such waterfalls of grace that I can't ask for more. Eph 3:20 - He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we can ask or imagine.

B) v6 - David looks again to the future - the rest of his days in this life and all of his days in the life to come. read. Now think about that. Surely (certainly, no doubt) goodness and mercy shall follow me (I can't outrun them, they will always be there) all the days of my life, (and when that's over) I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The Lord is the kind of shepherd that will make you lie down in green pastures, lead you to still waters, restore your soul, lead you in righteousness, be with you in death that will only be a shadow, grace you beyond measure in this life, never let you get out of the reach of His goodness and mercy toward you in Christ, and ultimately and finally, He brings you to Himself to live with Him in glory forevermore. That my friend is all yours when the Lord is Your Shepherd.