

**Psalm 23: 4-6; “The Lord’s Providential Care”, A Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 in the Afternoon Worship Service; the day that Hannah Pfeifer was baptized, and brought into the church.**

This morning I showed you how if the Lord Jesus is your Shepherd, that you shall not want. You shall not lack any good thing in relation to knowing God. You shall not lack any good thing in relation to living the Christian life. You shall not lack any good thing in relation to your soul being fed and watered and restored while you are seeking to do God’s will in everything. Now, this afternoon I would like to complete our study of this Psalm by showing you how Christ Your Good Shepherd leads you through the difficulties of this life to the eternal glory of dwelling in His house forever. I want to set forth for you now, 6 more ways that Christ shepherds your soul. He does so by His continual providential watch-care over your life, dear Christian.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The Lord providentially cares for you in all of the valleys of life and death.**

Verse 4 says – “Yea, 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.” Walking through the valley of the shadow of death is not simply the valley that you pass through just before you are going to die, although it is certainly that. But it also encompasses all the different valleys of humiliation, difficulty, and trial, that you pass through while on the path of righteousness. It includes all of those things in which you feel that there is a dark shadow over you. You are trying to do the right thing, but there are many points in your experience where you know that you need the Good Shepherd’s care. You need to know the reality of His being with you.

I am sure that if you have been a Christian for any length of time that you have come to realize that sense of Christ’s presence with you, by your realizing that His Spirit is witnessing to your spirit that you are a child of God. But you have understood that you do not always sense His presence with you. In fact, at certain points in your experience you may have even felt as though He had deserted you. But is this true? No, it is not true according to this verse, and other places in the Scripture, such as Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5 – “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.” “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.’” “What can man do to me?”

So how do we explain this apparent contradiction between the word of God and our experience of sometimes not feeling His presence with us? It is simply this. You must believe the truth of the promise of God’s word, even when you do not feel His presence. I hope that you have grown to understand that God does not always or even often give you a sense of His presence experientially. He has good reasons for this. You should understand that He wants you to live by faith in Him; not by your feelings at any given time. And so you should not conclude that He has left you when you cannot feel a conscious sense of His presence. You should believe that He is always with you, working in you by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit, but you believe this by faith and accept the fact that He wants it this way for you.

In this regard, the rest of verse 4 should be your experience. His rod and His staff, they comfort you. You believe that God sovereignly watches over your life, and He is watching out for your good at every point, that you might make progress in righteousness, holiness, and truth. What does the Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, use His the rod and His staff for? He uses it for the protection of His sheep from all enemies, spiritual and physical, and He guides them to into everything that He would have them to do, in righteousness, out of love to Him and to people around them. His rod is really a shepherd’s crook. And He uses it to pull them back onto the path when they need it. He uses it to direct them into the way of righteousness in the most dark and difficult of situations.

What is most comforting to the Christian to think about while they are going through the valley of the shadow of death, is the thought that Christ is with them as their Good Shepherd. Would you

have eternal comfort and good hope in the midst of all of your passing through the valley of the shadow of death? Then remember your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is right there with you by His Spirit. He died so that you might live. He came that you might have life, and that more abundantly. He died so that He could give you His Holy Spirit to live in your heart, so that He might be with you always. It is because He died and rose again that death itself shall only be a walk in the shadow. It will not hurt you dear Christian. It is designed to cause you to draw nearer to Him, the One who loved you and has given Himself for you, that you might be with Him forever, and behold His glory.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – The Lord shows you His Providential Care in His preparing a table for you in the presence of your enemies.**

Verse 5 – “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” The words here if we would understand them in their depths would read this way – You prepare for me good and nourishing spiritual provision and sustenance, in the presence of my enemies when other people around me are opposed to my doing your will. You strengthen my soul and my heart with grace so that I am able to have a right attitude when facing opposition from people who do not like me. You let me know Your provision of grace when I am most oppressed by my enemies; even in their very presence. You are even able to encourage my heart by making all grace abound to me so that I can actually be joyful and expectant concerning all of Your working and all of Your help toward me, in the midst of all of my greatest trials.

That is what David is saying here, and he had many occasions to prove it in his own experience. There were numbers of times when he was surrounded by enemies, and yet this was an ever present literal spiritual reality for him, that God had prepared a table for him in the presence of his enemies. You recall the time in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 18, after David killed the Philistine, that Saul invited him into his kingly court because he wanted to reward David. He would even have him sit at his banqueting table. And while David was playing the harp for Saul, to calm Saul’s spirit, he actually became David’s enemy, when he became envious of him because the women had said Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands. He threw his spear at David and thought to pin him to the wall. Saul had brought him to his table to kill him, but God had prepared a table before David in the presence of his enemies.

It was a spiritual table where he could feast on the faithfulness of God’s blessings and his care over his life. What is the lesson for ourselves? It is this. God is able to provide for your every single true need, as you learn to trust in Him, in every situation. You trust in Him rather than complain against Him. You trust in Him and will not let yourself become afraid thinking of what might happen to you. And you need to understand that all during that time, that Christ your Shepherd is thinking upon you. He studies you, to know about all of the details of the way that you think in relation to what you think that you need to be helped and satisfied. God full well knows how to meet and to satisfy all of your needs, and all of the legitimate desires of your heart.

You need to expect, by faith, that He really will provide a table for you in the midst of your particular wilderness, or your particular enemies. He will set this table for you. Let us remember that Christ prepared the table of the Lord’s Supper for His disciples before He went to the cross. In the presence of His enemy Judas, who went immediately, after partaking of the sop, to betray Jesus to the Chief Priests, He prepared this table for them. His true disciples benefitted by this bread and the wine, spiritually. And as they were partaking of the emblems of our Lord’s death, and sitting at His table they found their spiritual life strengthened. You, too, will receive all of the benefits of Christ’s death and intercession as You feed upon Him by faith, even if you are surrounded by people who are acting as enemies to you. Let not your heart always be suspicious of people around you and their motives. Rather, entrust your soul to God for all the strength that you need, all the provision that only He can provide for, and for all safe-keeping of your soul and body. And believe that He will set the table for you to be sustained throughout all the trials that you will go through.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – The Lord shows you His Providential Care in anointing your head with oil.**

It is God who anointed David's head with oil, through the ministry of the Prophet Samuel. But this is not what our passage in Psalm 23 is speaking of. It actually refers to the custom in that day of anointing a person with oil on festive occasions, as a means of refreshment. It was done so that the person might rejoice and be glad on that occasion of celebration. Even so, when David says, "You anoint my head with oil", he is speaking of God's anointing him (and all believers trusting in God) with the Spirit. In this anointing there is a crowning of them with lovingkindness and compassion and tender mercies.

There is in this anointing the realization of God's great faithfulness to keep all of His promises to you. Listen to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1: 18-22 – "But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No." "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us – by me, Silvanus, and Timothy – was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes." "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit." This is how it is for the Christian. All of the promises of God are true and Yes and Amen in Christ. And God will establish you in Christ as you trust in Him, and He will anoint you with His Holy Spirit, and give to you joy and power in living the Christian life, as you obey Him in relation to the Scriptures.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> – He shows you His Providential Care in His pouring for you an overflowing cup.**

"My cup overflows." The cup is the picture of your spiritually drinking of what the Lord has providentially ordered for your life. Listen to Psalm 16: 5 – "O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot." "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance." David is saying here – You, O Lord, have assigned to me all the blessings of my life and all of the trials and difficulties of my life. I receive them both as my portion; both the blessings and the trials, having faith that You know what is best for me. I know that You have graciously ordered these things for me, Lord. I am not saved by my good works, but I am rewarded by You based upon my behavior before You. But everything which comes to me is sweetened by Your covenant faithfulness.

Day by day I taste of Your continual thoughtfulness and Your kindness concerning me; to appoint for me what would be for my highest good, and for Your glory. You have plans for me, Lord, and you maintain my lot in life as a righteous person. Since You are so kind and good to me, I find that my life has been, for the most part, pleasant. "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." I reflect upon the fact that I have not received from You what I have deserved, according to my sins, but I have received grace upon grace in order to see my sins forgiven, repentance granted to me, and grace to sustain and transform my life given to me so that I am becoming more like Christ.

Indeed, when I think of all the rich blessings that you daily bestow upon me, it is like a cup that is overflowing. You have poured the riches of the grace of Christ into the cup of my heart, and I am overwhelmed with Your constant love for me, and Your care over my life. Will you not remember these things, dear Christian? The Lord as Your Good Shepherd is giving you out of His fullness, what is needful and what is good for you in the thousand situations of your life, so that You will grow in faith and thankfulness to Him; so that you will not take the things that He does for you, for granted, but you will press on to know Him better, and you will confess that His ways which are higher than your ways, and His thoughts which are higher than your thoughts, are always better than what you could do for yourself, without His love and care? May it bring you continual joy that you have such a Shepherd watching over you, making your life worth living to its fullest and to His great glory.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> – The Lord shows you His Providential Care in His personally following you around, doing you good.**

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...." Goodness and mercy are here personified to indicate to us God's faithfulness to do good to all of His people; all of those who

are trusting in Christ for their salvation; all of those who want to learn and to walk in His ways. God Himself, because of Christ and what He has done for us, follows us around, so to speak, to do us good. This is not a literally physical following, but a literally spiritual following us. Listen to Jeremiah 32: 40 – “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart Me.” “Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good.” Now, although these promises are given to the Jews, in relation to their conversion to Christ, and their being given all of the blessings of salvation, they are also given to us Gentiles because the New Covenant in Christ encompasses not only the Jews, but also all of the Gentiles who will trust in Christ as well.

Listen to another passage of Scripture which speaks of the New Covenant blessings coming to the Jews, and through them to all nations everywhere when they are converted. Isaiah 30: 19-21 – “For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; You shall weep no more.” “He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.” “And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers.” “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it, whenever you turn to the right hand or the left.”

This is how Goodness and Mercy follow us all the days of our lives. You hear His word behind you, speaking to your mind and heart. It is because God is faithful to show us His goodness and kindness each and every day, for Christ’s sake, and we then by His grace can trust in His lovingkindness and glory in it.” The question is – Are you doing this? Are you trusting in God’s faithfulness? Are you convinced that goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life; even the worst of those days, because of what Christ has done for you? Ah, this is the blessed life of the Christian disciple; to learn all that God would teach you, and that you will glory in the good care and mercy of your covenant-keeping God. He will never fail nor forsake you. He will always be with you, and always be with His Church until the end of the age.

**6<sup>th</sup> – He shows you His Providential Care in His bringing you to dwell in His house forever.**

“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” This is truly the most pleasant of thoughts to the Christian; the sureness of God’s promise, to bring them to heaven, and to keep them there with Him forever. I think of this saying of the Lord Jesus to His disciples before His going to the cross. John 14: 1 – “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.” “I go to prepare a place for you.” “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

The Father has as many mansions as He has people whom He has chosen to eternal life. You who believe in Him shall dwell with Him forever. But do you know that you shall indeed have your own place to dwell in? The Lord Jesus has gone ahead of you to prepare a place for you; a place of rest and peace, a place in which you will be happy and satisfied to be there, forever. I want you to remember this, as I close this sermon; that God always knows exactly what will be good for you, and what will truly be a blessing to you. And as you trust in Him, Christ will lead you into all the truth of this, and all the reality of it. He has given you His Holy Spirit to be with you forever. So that we can say, even as it is written in Deuteronomy 33: 26, 27 says – “There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your help, and through the skies in His majesty.” “The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”