

Sermon The Lord is my Shepherd

Psalm 23; John 10:1-10

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Psalm 23 is the most favorite psalm for many people. It is used in all denominations, at weddings, at funerals, and in personal life. I guess this is because this Psalm of King David expresses very vividly how our God cares for us. And the Psalm expresses our desire to experience this care.

God cares for us; he loves us; he is loyal to his children; he will never let us go.

This faithful love of God for us unfolds in three stages in this song of King David.

1. The Lord cares for us

First, David sings of God as his Shepherd. Why did he do this?

In ancient Middle East, the image of the shepherd was used for kings and for gods.

It spoke of the task of the kings to care for all their people, and of their power to decide the fate of their people.

David himself was a shepherd before he became a king, so for him the imagery was clear. The shepherd fights for his sheep, to give them security and to satisfy them with what they need.

And as such a shepherd, the Lord God guards us and cares for us...

- He give us our food.
- He quenches our thirst.
- he restores our soul. Gives new strength
- he leads us on the right path of life.

Will you have a job next year? How will you studies go? How will it be to live in another country again? What about my pension arrangements? Will my children be okay? What about old parents far away? What about this dangerous extremism of ISIS, will it affect us?

God is your shepherd and he will take care of you. It is not bad to see this work of God our Shepherd in very physical terms. He gives us food to eat. He ensures we drink. He keeps our life safe. He makes us walk safely even on the scary roads of Cairo. He takes care of your kids, even when they grow up and you have to let go of them. What about my health and the health of those we love? He cares for you.

Well, not always, it seems. This is one of the riddles of life. Sometimes the grass is not so green. We may face multiple problems.

Today Armenians worldwide, and many church leaders with them, commemorate the Armenian genocide of 100 years ago. Where was the good shepherd when he was really needed?

We do not have clear answers, or maybe none, to this riddle of life. If God is almighty and good, why does he not intervene in our problems? We do not know.

We do know that he send his son to be part of this misery. And to be with us, even in the darkest days.

And the ultimate promise of the shepherd is that he will bring us home to the eternally green pastures.

Our God is interested in our whole life - he is the one who made it and he became one of us. So he cares for your body. For who you are. For your whole life. As Christians we believe that all of life is important for God, your work, your safety, your relationships, what you eat and drink.

But of course, for that same reason, God also cares about how you feel. Your soul. What goes on inside your heart and mind. And in that realm of heart and mind, he also promises to feed us, to quench our thirst, to restore us.

When you may feel stressed or depressed, or lonely, in moments when you notice the lack of love and compassion in your heart for others, or when you experience the unfaithfulness of others, then God himself is there with his love and compassion.

He does not let go of you; he satisfies your heart and your mind. He does this by his word; through other Christians; by Holy Communion; or by a song; a friend who helps you; in your time of prayer where he seems to whisper words of comfort in your ears

How great to know that the Lord is my shepherd. He is a shepherd.

2. He is with us in dark days

But this promise of God to feed us and to quench our thirst, actually presupposes that sometimes we are hungry and thirsty. Our life goes through ups and downs and sometimes the downs seem to have the upper hand.

Some Christian think that we must always be happy, good, positive, satisfied. That may be a great ideal, but it is not the reality of our Christian life.

Why do you think Paul says that you must always rejoice in the Lord? Because we do not always do this.

Why do we read again and again in the bible that we must love each other? Because we do not do this.

It is normal for Christians to be at low points. We are normal human beings, and we must always be reminded that God is our Shepherd who helps us.

David even speaks of the valley of the shadow of death. There are awful times in life. And maybe you are at such a time.

When David speaks of the work of the good Shepherd, the feeding, the quenching, the caring, he describes God. He speaks about what God does.

But when David describes the darkest moments in his life, when death seems to cast a shadow over him, then he begins to address God directly. 'You are with me. You comfort me. You prepare a table before me. You anoint me.'

In times of need, God becomes our companion. The Psalms are great teachers for us, for our own prayer life. It is good to talk about the mercies of God, but when darkness comes, the only thing left is to talk with God.

What is the valley of the shadow of death? We can think, again, in very physical terms. David was afraid his enemies would have the upper hand and kill him. Some of the roads in Cairo also seem to be such valley of shadow of death when you try to cross them. Or we may have feared death at times of riots last year. Or we face sickness.

But our hearts and minds also know the valleys with dark shadows. The truly bad moments when we feel down and out. When problems hang like a dark shadow over us. When we have no words left. When we are drained of all energy. When we feel no hope. Or joy.

In times like these, simply talking about God is not so helpful. Nor does our theological knowledge provide much comfort. The only thing left is to speak to God himself.

The Shepherd leads us to food, to drink, but when we are in deep trouble, in that dark Valley, when we need a whole lot more than food or drink, then the Shepherd is really in the midst of his sheep. 'You are with me.' Even if we do not know what to pray. He is with us.

He is with you. That is a deeper reality than your ability to feel that. His presence is more true than your ability to pray. If you do not feel, if you cannot pray, if all is dark, He is still there with you in the darkness. In the valley of the shadow of death.

So even when it is pitch dark. The Great Shepherd is there, beside you. And he is armed. He has his rod and his staff with him, to defend his sheep and to lead them to safety. If we have no words left, even no prayers, the Shepherd does not change. His love for us lasts forever. He cares for his sheep even when the sheep have temporarily lost sight of the shepherd.

God has made a covenant with his people, with you, and He will not let you fall out of his hands. You may stumble you may fall, but he always picks you up again. The Shepherd who cares for us is JHWH, the Lord. The one who is almighty and who made a strong covenant with us.

The LORD is your Shepherd.
He will never abandon you

3. He is with us always

The shepherd-imagery is great for showing us how much God cares for us - but the Psalm proceeds and then begins to use images - images of friendship; of togetherness. Language of even greater intimacy.

"Your prepare a table before me..." Eating and drinking at the table with the Lord signifies great intimacy. Being the guest of God means to live with him. With God, people do not go in and out.

The door to his Kingdom is not a revolving door where we go in and out all the time because we forget to pray or because we are less than perfect.

David rejoices that he “will be in the house of the Lord forever.” That is where David lives. Well not literally, David had his palace. But he knew the faithfulness of God, so he could exclaim with joy that where God is, there is also David’s permanent resting place. And where David is, there is God, always.

The house of the Lord signifies also the community of the temple of the new covenant, that is, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the whole psalm David speaks in the first person singular. It is about I, and me. But we must not read the psalm in an individualistic manner. The psalm was made for singing in the house of God; it is in the community of the believers where David experienced this care and presence of God.

God works through means, and the means he most often uses, are other Christians, and his church. In order to sing this Psalm with David, we must be part of this community of the House of God.

Our faith is not individualistic. But at the same time, it is a personal faith. “The Lord is *my* Shepherd”, David knows. And this is also important for us.

To be able to say that he is MY shepherd is not the same as to recognize that he is a Shepherd. Even the devil knows that.

He is God
He is Lord
He is Shepherd
Yes, all true.

But that only helps us if that little word ‘my’ is also a reality. Is he your shepherd? How can this be?

Our Lord Jesus Christ made it possible for us to call God our Shepherd.

The Psalm of David only deepens in meaning when we see that Jesus himself says, ‘I am the good shepherd.’”

He went through the valley of the shadows of death for us - and therefore he can bring us to the green pastures to feed us and to quench our thirst.

He also prepares a table before us - even in presence of our enemies.

If we suffer from enemies - loneliness, or depression, or bad health, or even the enemy of doubting that God cares for you, then look at Jesus and what he did. He showed with his life and death and resurrection that He is almighty, that he loves and cares. God is almighty, and loves, and cares.

Our Lord Jesus gave his life for the sheep, and he sets a table before us today, his table teaches us,

- > The Shepherd gave his life for you
- > He wants to feed you day in day out
- > He cares for you
- > He is close to you
- > He dines with you - what a symbol of great friendship
- > And at the dinner table he says to you, I am your Shepherd, you are my sheep
- > I am your host, you are my friend

To come to him with empty hands is enough. We come with empty hands to his table. And there He fills them and He whispers in your ear: I am your shepherd, do not be afraid, I take care of you...

Let us be silent for some moments and in our hearts, share our needs, our personal needs with our Shepherd and our friend. He is as close to you as the rhythm of your heart. Speak with him, the Lord, your shepherd.

Amen