October 19, 2020 Devotional

Let us contemplate the following psalm from the Old Testament: Psalm 23.

This psalm has been a source of comfort, assurance and inspiration for Jews and Christians down through the ages. The author, David, a shepherd, before he became the King of Israel, ponders the nature of God. David meditates upon God’s character, God’s faithfulness and God’s goodness.

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.** What does this image conjure up for you? I believe it is saying God is the leader of our life. It says that we are totally dependent upon God, like sheep are to their shepherd. We rely upon God for protection, direction, purpose, guidance, strength, sustenance and compassion. God like a shepherd, meets our basic needs.

It is saying that we belong to God. We are under God’s power and authority; we cannot go it alone. We need someone greater than ourselves to be with us. We can depend upon God. A shepherd is so committed to His sheep, that he is even willing to sacrifice his life for a single lamb. Does that bring an image to mind?

Further, it says God knows us. I learned in Israel that shepherds really know their sheep and sheep really known their shepherds. Sheep recognize and trust the shepherd’s voice. Sheep will run from strangers, but they will respond upon hearing the voice of their shepherd. Our relationship to God is personal, intimate and close. What is your relationship to God like?

**He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.** Picture in your mind a time in which you enjoyed a moment of peace. Like a shepherd, God leads us on life’s journey to good places and good spaces. God knows there are times when we need to rest. God provides such times on life’s journey. God by His power restores our soul. When have you felt your soul restored?

**God leads us in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.** God sometimes leads us inpaths of righteousness, that is, in paths of duty, where God calls us to do something that is difficult because God wants to use us to fulfill His will. God sometimes calls us to do the right thing, even though we don’t want to. Can you think of an example in your life? It may be standing alongside someone who is being exploited by others. It may be a cause that you know in your heart needs to be taken on and you feel personally called to step up. It may be sacrificing for someone who is in great need. When has God called you to walk the path of righteousness?

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.** Death is the darkest valley through which we walk in this life. And yet, by the grace and mercy of God, and the love of brothers and sisters of faith, we can find the courage and the strength to get through it.

While walking through the valley we occasionally see glints of light. Gradually, God begins to bring light to our darkness. This is what I have found. How about you? Our faith assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. God’s grace brings comfort to us. I think of church members who are grieving, who have told me that without their faith and God’s grace, without the love and support of family, church members, neighbors and friends, they would not have made it through. Dark valleys are never God’s destination. They are places that we walk through along the journey of life. That’s what I have experienced. What have you experienced?

**I will not fear.** Is it possible to live without fear in a world where there is evil? I see a difference between never being afraid, and finding courage in the face of fear by trusting in God. God is more powerful than evil. Scripture says: “*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* *Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.** Here the psalmist pictures a different image, God is a host who offers hospitality to His people. Even when we are surrounded by enemies, literally or figuratively, God is with us. God is present and offers to us moments of spiritual renewal and refreshment**.**

**You anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows.** References to oil and to an overflowing cup further amplify God as a host. Oil in the ancient Near East was a means of refreshment to weary travelers. Healing oils were rubbed on the forehead to ease the pain and stress of travel. The overflowing cup is an image of a cup of cool water or a cup of wine. These were gifts of hospitality to pilgrims on their travels. Can you think of an example of God offering hospitality to you?

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**  God’s mercy is steadfast, today and forever. In these closing words, the psalmist is thinking on two levels – worshipping with other Jews in the temple in Jerusalem and picturing living one day in God’s eternal temple.

May this psalm of David, bring comfort and peace to you, as you meditate upon it.

The Lord be with you,

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