

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want

The Lord is my Shepherd....the 23rd Psalm--words of comfort and hope we memorized as children and that as adults we think about as part of funeral and memorial services for our friends, family members, and for ourselves. Sometimes in the familiarity of the Psalm we want to simply move from, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," and just jump to, "and surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." But there is a lot in between v.1 and v. 6.

Sometimes we tend to gloss over the "shepherd and his sheep" metaphor as simply context of the life and times of the psalm's author (David). Now if the Lord is our Shepherd, that makes us the sheep. Sheep are dull, and innocent creatures incapable of defending themselves. For example, sheep that fall on their backs cannot get up unless someone rolls them over and helps them to stand on their feet. Left alone, they die; victims of starvation, dehydration, vultures, hyenas and other predators. Sheep are prone to wander, heedless of danger and peril, and are reliant on their shepherd for guidance and protection. But here's what we need to understand: we can't see God as Shepherd if we don't see ourselves as sheep. When we open our eyes to how much we really need and rely on God for everything, the more we realize His provision in our lives. But if we live in the lie that we can do this on our own, we wander and drift away from our true source, looking for satisfaction in artificial places. "I shall not want" because God, as a good shepherd, will ensure I have everything I need. "I shall not want," not because of what I've done or can do, but because God loves me. "I shall not want" because I know God personally as my Shepherd.

Psalm 23 is about life's journey; and it's not a sprint, it is a marathon with the Lord, our shepherd, beside us, behind us, and ahead of us every step of the way. *"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness. . . Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. . . You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows"*. Life is a journey that we have to take every day and there are no shortcuts. We come upon many a valley of the shadow of death. But it's just not an obstacle to experiencing the love, mercy and goodness of God. It becomes the occasion where we will experience God's presence again and again. When we can recall where God has been with us that brought us to this point (in green pastures, by still waters, in the very reaches of our soul), then we can take confidence that, as we are walking into the places where we are exposed, where we feel vulnerable, where we feel afraid, we have our shepherd and we are not defenseless. We have hope and assurance that our shepherd protects us from our enemies, heals our wounds, and provides more sustenance than we can hold—our cup overflows.

We are sheep, my friends. We can't navigate life's journey on our own. Thank God, for Jesus the Good Shepherd, who knows us all, who knows each of us, is with us in every valley of the shadow of death, and promises that *" . . . goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

Come and worship the Lord this Sunday at 10 AM

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