

June 20, 2021

Psalm 23

Father's Day

Children's message: This Psalm is about a shepherd leading his sheep. Some have said that the shepherd is Jesus and that He is leading us home to Heaven. In the Psalm home is a very different place for sheep and humans. The Psalm tells the sheep that there is so much space in the field that you can stretch out and relax. There is lots of grass to eat and no wolves or lions to fear. Their home is a place where there is so much. The sheep don't want or need anything. It sounds like heaven for a sheep.

In this version of home the shepherd leads the sheep to peaceful waters. So that they can quench their thirst. I didn't know this, but sheep will not drink from running waters. They will not drink from a brook or stream. Many times shepherds will dam up brooks and streams. So the sheep would have calm waters to drink from. It sounds like beavers and sheep would get along great.

Jesus is our shepherd. He is leading us to our spiritual home in heaven. It is a place where everyone is welcomed and valued as a daughter and son of God. Jesus only gave us two commandments to lead us there. That we love God with everything inside us and that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. It may sound very simple, but you would be surprised at how many can't or won't follow those commandments. How you understand heaven is only limited by your imagination. Think about that!

Some have said that we have been living Psalm 23 for the last year and more. Everyone has been at home in order to stay safe and to keep other safe. Home is a place of love and comfort. Did you ever think in your wildest thoughts that you would be doing school at home? People are even working from home. In the last year home has become very important. Home has taken on a new meaning. People are doing a lot more things from home. Yet there is coming a time when we will be able to leave home and return to our old ways. We have been lucky to have such an important place in our lives. Just as our understanding of home has changed, rethink our heavenly home that Jesus is leading us to.

Adult's message: This is probably the most well known of David's Psalms. I would go so far to say that it is the most recalled section of scripture. People who are not church folk seem to remember the first line of this Psalm. Mostly at funerals. This Psalm has been reinterpreted by so many over the ages. The children's message had an apocalyptic tone to it. There are messianic interpretations, liturgical ones and from a sheep's perspective.

I will give you two very different interpretations of this Psalm. Our understanding of this Psalm continues to evolve by how we interpret it. Psalm 23 is a living entity and gives testimony to the fact that God's word is living.

This is a Christian perspective on Psalm 23. It is sung in many churches as it relates to the Gentile. We are the ones rejoicing because the Lord is Our Shepherd. When we read it we are recounting the mystical supper the Shepherd has put out amongst us. We remember Maundy

Thursday. Many Christians see it as a liturgical Psalm but most importantly a Eucharistic Psalm.

Many churches see Psalm 23 as having a great sacramental element. This Psalm talks about calm and peaceful water. Many Christians relate it to baptism. The oil mentioned in the Psalm refers to messiahship. Yet we anoint a child at baptism and final prayers before death. The spreading of the table speaks to the Last Supper prepared by Our Lord. He is our good shepherd. That when we celebrate eucharist, it is to remember Him and for the forgiveness of our sins.

All scripture is looked at with new eyes after Our Lord's resurrection. The old verses of scripture take on a new life and meaning. Scripture evolves over time and the reality it finds itself in. Scripture is not meant to be stagnant or dead. How you and I interpret and understand them gives them life in their meaning. They are always evolving as time rolls on.

I have listened to many rabbis interpret this Psalm. Some very simple and accurate and others just far out there. This one is simple and culturally accurate. I found it beautiful to watch the evolution of God's word from a Hebrew perspective to a Christian one.

This rabbi said that the Lord is my shepherd. That will become a very powerful statement. Then the rabbi asked, "what is it like to be a sheep." For one thing they will not experience any lack. Nothing will be missing for them. They will have everything they want and need. The rabbi mentioned that the Hebrew word for shepherd and friend are very similar in sound and spelling. So the shepherd is my friend. Then God is my friend. There is a close intimate connection of familiarity. God and I are close buddies. He is the one I can trust. He has my back.

This friend of mine doesn't just make me lay down in green pastures. In Hebrew it translates as sprawl. The green field is that lush that each sheep can sprawl out and relax. My friend leads me to the quiet waters of peace.

In the King James translation we are lead through the valley of the shadow of death. It is a poor translation. In the Hebrew it is just a really dark valley. There is no death in the original Hebrew. The rabbi goes on to explain that the verse is very simple. David was trying to cross enemy lines. In order to get back to his people. He had to go through a dark valley undetected. He didn't know or see if Saul or the Philistines were laying in wait for him. It is a very simple verse when you hear it explained this way.

In Hebrew, the rabbi said the rod and staff are about correction and support. They both are there to comfort me equally. The rod is used to correct bad behaviour. There are times a good whack can straighten you out. The staff was used to lean on in the field by the shepherd.

The interpretation of the table before enemies is cultural. We would miss that in the west. When the Jews celebrate and set a table, it was a custom to call in those who did us wrong. Not physically but spiritually. In order to make them present. So we remember them around the table. The rabbi called these people our hard teachers. We learned hard lessons from them. They may have harmed us or cheated us. We gain experiences from them. Hopefully we learned the lesson well. Hopefully we become better people for the experience, as negative as it was. The cup set for us at the table does not run over. In Hebrew the cup satisfies us and we no longer thirst.

You can see how beautifully Psalm 23 has evolved from a simple Hebrew interpretation to the many Christian ones out there. The scriptures are truly alive and continue to have a new meaning for each generation.

A Happy and Blessed Father's Day to all of our Fathers and Dads out there. Everyday is Father's Day so celebrate it at any time and in any place. That goes double for moms. Pastor D