

# Psalm 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it is the season of holiday, isn't it? It's the season when here at the Lunchtime Talk, our numbers do dwindle a bit as our friends! are away on holiday.

And it's natural for us to desire to get away, isn't it? To refresh ourselves after many weeks and months of labor and work. I've just gotten back from holiday myself, and it was very nice to get away.

To get away for even just a few days. We all have different ways that we like to relax, don't we? We all have different ways that we go and seek refreshment.

Some of us like to spend our time sightseeing. I personally prefer to sit on the beach and relax amidst the sun and the waves.

Your beaches here are beautiful. We just got back from the beach. But they're freezing cold. While elders like to go and spend time with extended family that they haven't seen in some times, but I thought since it's the season of refreshment, and it is the season where we like to get away, I thought that we would spend a few moments today looking at the biblical idea of refreshment.

[ 1 : 19 ] Where does refreshment come from? Is it something that we go and achieve ourselves, or is it something that is a gift to us? And we see here in Psalm 23 a whole lot about biblical refreshment.

And there are three points that I'd like us to notice here in just our few minutes together. The first is the source of true refreshment. The second is the place of true refreshment.

And finally, the direction of true refreshment. So we begin with the source of true refreshment. And we see this in our first three verses, don't we? David tells us immediately.

David, of course, is the psalmist who is writing these verses. He immediately tells us the source of his refreshment. It's the Lord. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. Why is he refreshed? Why is he seemingly unconcerned about physical and spiritual needs?

[ 2 : 24 ] It's because he has a shepherd, the Lord, caring for him. See, David actually recognizes two things here. First, he recognizes his own nature.

And secondly, he recognizes the nature of God, the shepherd. See, David here actually places himself in the position of a sheep. Now, I don't know a whole lot about sheep, so I did copious amounts of research into this over the last few weeks.

You have many more sheep here, I think, than we have in the U.S., where I come from. When I think of a sheep, I think of Sean the sheep. Britain's own.

Sean is brilliant, isn't he? He's really fantastic. He's clever. He's absolutely capable of taking care of himself and all of his friends.

Now, again, I've done a lot of research on this. And I've discovered something that may shock you. Sean the sheep is a complete fabrication. I mean, I thought for sure that TV was always a reliable source for explaining reality.

[ 3 : 38 ] It turns out, though, that it's not. Sean the sheep is based on a lie. Sheep, it turns out, are not actually very intelligent.

Sheep are incapable of defending themselves against predators. Sheep have a tendency to be deaf and blind. I read a story about a herd of sheep in Scotland.

And the herd decided to follow one sheep in particular. You may call him the Sean of that herd. Well, the Sean decided to walk off the edge of a cliff.

And all the other sheep decided to follow this sheep over the edge of the cliff. Now, there was a silver lining. Fortunately, they didn't all perish in their fall.

After a while, the carcasses built up and broke the fall of the later sheep. So that's something, right? But that doesn't make a very nice cartoon for children, does it?

[ 4 : 33 ] What I want us to understand about this, though, my point in bringing this up, is that sheep have a natural predisposition towards their own destruction.

In the absence of a shepherd, they will scatter, and they will certainly meet with a very quick death. Now, how is that relevant to us?

Think for a moment how we in our modern society view ourselves. We are told that we have greater knowledge than at any point in the history of mankind.

We have greater access to knowledge. We know more about the reality of our world than our forefathers. We have greater technology than at any point in human history.

We're to the point now where we're not only exploring our own world, but worlds beyond ours.

You've probably seen recently the incredible photos of Pluto that are being released by NASA.

[ 5 : 30 ] We're at the point now where the founders of the internet company Google are trying to figure out how to make humanity immortal. That's going to be a frustrating job for someone, I'm sure.

But what David implies of himself and of us and of all humanity in the history of the world is that we are naturally predisposed to our own destruction.

And the only way to have hope, the only way to have life, the only way to have true refreshment is to submit to the guidance and care of a shepherd.

And the shepherd that David knows and the one that he describes here in such beautiful language is the kind of shepherd we should want, isn't it? He is kind to his sheep.

He leads them to the places of true refreshment where they can be refreshed with green pastures and still waters. Not only that, this shepherd meets the deep spiritual longings of his sheep.

[ 6 : 34 ] He restores their very souls. And he can do all of this because he is the Lord, the God of all creation, the maker of David and of all of us.

He is the source of our true refreshment. But when and where does he refresh us? We see here in verse 4 the place of our true refreshment.

He says this, Even 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.

So what is the valley of the shadow of death? Well, it's actually a very realistic and sobering term for the here and the now.

It's in one way of really saying the world that we occupy. It's exactly what it sounds like. It's an unpleasant place where there is pain and sadness and suffering, where hardship and brokenness is an inevitability.

[ 7 : 42 ] What David tells us is that the place of refreshment is in the here and the now. It's in the valley of the shadow of death, in the dark places. Now this contrasts with what many Christians might tell you.

Often times when we're going out trying to tell people about Jesus and how great Christianity is, you'll hear people say, Well, when I trusted in Jesus, I was happy all the time, and everything was nice and good, and everything's just always so great now.

Now these people are either lying, or they're delusional, or they're setting themselves up for severe disappointment. Because what David shows us is something very different.

And the reason why David describes his life and his world this way is because he was a man who knew what it was to suffer. David was a man who knew what it was to lose close friends and family prematurely.

He was a man who knew the helplessness of having to stand by and watch his own child die. He was a man who knew what it was to be betrayed by close family.

[ 8 : 54 ] See, he understood the reality of life in our world in a profound way. And his expectation of that life was not that he would enjoy constant pleasure, but that he is strengthened by God to face the calamities of this life.

See, for David, the place of refreshment is here. And now, as long as God stands with him. Now what about us?

What is our place of refreshment? Usually for us, our place of refreshment is found anywhere but here, isn't it? If I could just make enough money to buy the house in the neighborhood, or this particular neighborhood, or a particular town, then I'll be okay.

If I could just make it to my next holiday, then I'll be okay. If I could just make it to next weekend, then everything will be a little bit better. If I could just get enough funding in my pension, then I'll be safe, I'll be secure.

We oftentimes turn to escape in order to find renewal. Whether that's losing ourselves in work. [10:11] Whether that's trying to buy the things that we feel give us pleasure. Whether that's seeking refreshment in the bed of a lover.

Or fleeing to a new location. We see this even, in a sense, in our current migrant crisis, don't we? Why are so many people trying to get into Great Britain?

It's because there are people who have walked through the valley of the shadow of death in a very real and very profound way. In a way that you and I probably and hopefully will never experience ourselves.

And our hope is that life in Great Britain will somehow be better. And in many ways it will be. But in many ways, they're going to experience a new and different kind of disappointment.

And they're going to experience a different kind of suffering. Just as all of us who live here already know, it's a wonderful place. But there are disappointments, aren't there? See, human nature is to seek refreshment by attempting to avoid pain and suffering.

[11:20] It's an attempt to try and avoid the brokenness of our world by any means necessary. But that is ultimately insufficient, isn't it? And see, what's interesting about the life of David is that suffering, what he calls the valley of the shadow of death, is something that's assumed by him.

It's an assumed aspect of his life. But David is also king. He's the last person that you would expect to suffer. He lives in the palace.

He has tremendous wealth. He's known as a great warrior. He's surrounded by family. He's surrounded by beautiful women, his wives and his concubines. He has everything that we think can prevent suffering in this life and this world.

If you walked out on the street and you said, what do you need to protect yourself from suffering and hardship? Most people would probably list one of those things as what they need to be happy in life.

But he expects suffering. But he also expects to be able to not only stand up under it, but to flourish under it.

[12:28] But only if God stands with him. I will fear no evil for you are with me. See, in places of darkness, companionship is always welcome and it's always comforting.

But some companions inspire greater confidence than others, don't they? See, the place of true refreshment is the place where God is found walking with us through our suffering.

God doesn't leave us to stand in our suffering. He meets us in it. He guides us through it. And he guides us in a very specific direction that we see in verses 5 and 6.

David reveals to us here the direction of true refreshment. He says this, As God directs our refreshment, as he guides David to full refreshment, there are two places that he leads us to.

The first is victory. And the second is home. The imagery of verse 5 is one of a celebratory feast. And we read that and we think, Well, why are the enemies there at this dinner?

[14:00] Because they are enemies that have been conquered. And they are now being brought under the rule of the conquering king. From being anointed with oil to drinking from the overflowing cup.

We see the imagery of David's enemies being brought into a covenant treaty with him. They no longer can do him harm. They are subjects of him.

And David acknowledges that this doesn't come from his own military skill or might. It's brought about because of the work of God who prepares the table. God is actively subduing David's enemies and bringing about true peace.

See, true peace has been found in the work of God on David's behalf. A work that brings goodness to his life and culminates in his dwelling in the house of God forever.

Once again, we have to juxtapose the words of David against the backdrop of his own life and his own experience. Remember, again, David is the king. He's a mighty warrior.

[15:08] And he lives in his palace. The most comfortable and secure house in his earthly kingdom. But he still is looking forward to the day when God will bring him to dwell in his house.

When he will overcome his enemies and bring him to live with him. Now let that sink in for a moment. David lives like the queen of England.

Yet he recognizes that he can't be satisfied until he lives in the house of the Lord. What's so great about that house? This is the point where I'm supposed to tell you that it's a really nice house. And David has a great room with an en suite, with a jetted tub separate from the shower, and a nice view overlooking the ocean, and a wet bar that never runs dry.

But that's not it, is it? It's a special house because of whose house it is. It's the Lord's. And it's the house of the king of creation.

[ 16 : 23 ] And he invites David to live there. And he invites you and I to live there. The one who walks us through our suffering.

The one who overcomes all of his and our enemies. Invites us to come and to live with him. It is home in its fullest and truest sense, isn't it?

It's home as it was always intended to be. Because it is home with our Creator who restores our very souls. See, true refreshment always comes back to the source.

David has shown us the source of true refreshment. He's shown us the place of true refreshment. He's shown us the direction of true refreshment. But he's shown us something even greater. He's shown us something about the character and work of God.

He is the shepherd who cares for you. The friend who walks through your sorrow with you. And the king who brings you into his home to dwell eternally with him.

[ 17 : 30 ] And there's even better news for you and for I. Because this God who David knew in shadows. And through the words of prophets. And who he can express deep truths about poetically.

This God we have known and experienced and seen fully and concretely. In the personal work of Jesus Christ. Who says this about himself.

Here's Jesus' words about himself. I am the good shepherd. And the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. See, everything that David says about the Lord.

Christ says about himself. He is the good shepherd who looks after his sheep. He is the good shepherd who walked through very real suffering.

For you and for I. And he's the king who's going to bring us all the way home. Please pray with me.