

Psalms 23

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[0 : 00] Well, this is the fourth sermon that I prepared this week.! We started off in Matthew 25, and then somebody reminded me that it was Palm Sunday on Tuesday.

! And then with Norman's death on Wednesday, I thought I was going to preach on heaven and speak to you about heaven. But then I was reading Psalm 23. I really hope that you're reading the Psalms during this time.

If you're not reading the Psalms, you are depriving yourself. And the wonderful thing, when we come to the Bible, we come to passages which we know are familiar, and we think, oh, we know what's coming.

And yet God, in his kindness, can take the most familiar words of his word and reveal truth to us by his Holy Spirit. And so I was reading Psalm 23, as I read it a number of times this week.

I'm sure you've read it too. And I think I've seen something new in it, which is always a dangerous thing to say. And you'll get your Palm Sunday sermon this evening.

[1 : 09] So Psalm 23, there are three trumpets that I want you to hear and I want you to remember. Three clarion calls that I hope will get you through this next week.

And I want you to hear them and I want you to remember them. The first is in verse 1. Can you see it?

I shall not want. The second is in verse 4. I will or I shall fear no evil.

And then in verse 6. Can you see it? I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I'm going to call them the three I wills of Psalm 23.

Or I shall and I will. I shall not want. That speaks to us, doesn't it, about provision. We don't know what this week will contain.

[2 : 13] Nobody does. Except the Lord God Almighty. The creator of heaven and earth. We don't know what this next month is going to contain.

And no one does. But in his provision, this Psalm is saying that all our needs are already met. We shall not want. The second trumpet addresses our circumstances.

Again, we don't know what we'll face, do we? Nobody does. Except the Lord God Almighty. The creator of heaven and earth. And the second trumpet says, as we look to the future. Can you see it? Can you hear it? I will fear no evil. He's made a provision for that as well. And the third trumpet, and it addresses our need for assurance and for certainty and for confidence as we look to the future. And the psalmist says, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. We don't know what to expect, but the one great expectation.

[3 : 17] The expectation beyond all other expectation remains steady and unchanging. Unsecure. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Can you hear those three truths? I shall not want. I will fear no evil. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Three focal points of this psalm.

I asked the children, what's the most famous psalm? And straight, crooks and button, they came back. Psalm 23. The Lord's my shepherd. We know it, don't we? Many of us can never remember a time when we didn't know this psalm.

Some of us had those awful photographs of sheep and lambs on a Welsh hillside with words, the Lord is my shepherd, written over it.

We know it. We know it so well. But I think it's sometimes the most familiar parts of scripture that we don't look carefully enough. We don't pay detailed attention to it. And the great truth of this psalm is that the Lord attends in person to every need we have, to every need.

[4 : 24] Do you see what it says? I shall not want. Why shall we not want? Why shall we not be in want? Because the Lord is my shepherd. He tends in person to every need. Shepherding is one of

the great pictures of the Lord and his people in the Bible.

But the Bible is full of pictures, isn't it? It makes it such a wonderful book. There's not only the picture of the shepherd and the sheep. There's the picture of the commander and the soldier. There's the picture of the bridegroom and the bride. There's the picture of the stone and the builder. The builder and the stone that makes up the building.

There are so many pictures. And no picture contains all the truth. But every picture is true all the time. That's quite good, isn't it?

No picture contains all the truth. But every picture is true all the time. So there are other pictures as well as shepherd and the sheep.

[5 : 32] And we need to bear that in mind. But the picture of the shepherd and the sheep is always, always, always true. Come what may. Come wind, come weather.

Come good times and come bad times. He is always the shepherd and we are always the sheep. And we can rely upon it. And we can rely upon the fact that he himself in person will attend to our every need.

I will fear no evil because the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want because the Lord is my shepherd. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord because he is my shepherd.

So if you've got a Bible open, I really hope you do, look at verse 2. Can you see in verse 2 there is rest and there is activity?

There is rest and there is activity. So he leads me. He makes me lie down in green pastures. And he leads me by still waters.

[6 : 34] There is a time of rest in green pastures. And there is a time of movement to still waters. But he is in charge all the time. He is attending to every need and to every situation.

If you look at verse 3, you will see in verse 3 that there is both inward and there is outward. In verse 3, he restores my soul.

That is the inward. And he leads me in the right path. That is the outward. And he is attending to every need for he is there in every situation.

And verses 4 and 5, if you look down, they deal with life's troubles and life's joys. So in verse 4, which we thought of so much this week, 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. But in verse 5, there is a picture of joy. You prepare a table before me.

[7 : 43] Trouble and joy. That valley there, it's not just the death valley, although it is. It's not only those times where we face death like we're facing it at the moment, But it's every valley.

Every valley, the Lord is there looking after us. In the dark times. But also in the feasting times, the party times.

When the Lord spreads a table before us. He's there with us in every situation. And then in verse 5, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. Do you see in the midst of enemies and of friends, He is there. Verse 5.

Verse 6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. That's the ongoing future, isn't it?

[8 : 55] And then the end of the verse, And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is the guaranteed future. The ongoing present. And the guaranteed future.

Do you see this psalm? There's loads of contrast, aren't there? I'm not sure I'd seen that before. And why is the psalm written in that way? It's written in that way so that you will see that in every situation, In rest and activity, Both inwardly and outwardly.

In life's troubles and life's joys. In the presence of your enemies and when you're with your friends. The ongoing present and the guaranteed future. In every circumstance.

In every time. The Lord is attending to every need. And He's looking after us. But I want you to notice this. I want you to notice that as the need becomes greater.

His presence becomes closer. And so look at how God is described. In verses 1 to 3.

[10 : 02] Can you do that? Just look with me. Look at how He's described. Verse 2. He. He.

Verse 3. He. He. But look how He's described in verse 4. Can you see that? In the dark valley. Suddenly we come to that word.

You. You. In verses 1 to 3. The Lord is out there. It is He. He is our shepherd. He makes us lie down.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me. Okay? But when the darkness gathers. And when the deepest darkness comes.

And when the shadow of death passes over us. The Lord ceases to be He. Out front. He becomes you. You.

[11:04] You alongside. Although I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. For you are with me. There's the close presence of the personal God.

The deeper the need. The closer the presence. Please register that. Please don't forget that.

He attends to every need. Yes. But the deeper the need. The closer the presence. No matter what the circumstances are. He can provide. In verse 5.

He says. You prepare a table before me. In the presence of my enemies. It's a really unusual time to have a party.

Isn't it? To throw a party in the presence of your enemies. Think of David. David wrote this psalm. King David.

[12:04] But he's fleeing from Absalom. And I think this is the situation. That David has actually got in mind. When he wrote this psalm. It is the psalm of a shepherd boy. But actually it's full of the thoughts.

Of an older man. Isn't it? I'm not sure a younger man. Could have written Psalm 23. And David is fleeing from Absalom. You remember the story. He's got a few days ahead start.

He's just managed to get away. By the skin of his teeth. And he made to get across the Jordan. And he puts the barrier of the river. Between himself and Absalom's pursuit.

And David and his party. They become faint. And they become weary. Through the wilderness. And there's this man. There's this man named Barzillai. Barzillai the Gideonite. And he.

A man who lived in the Transjordan. And we read in the Bible. That he brought out bread. And beds. And cakes. And raisins.

[13:01] And water. To meet the king in the wilderness. Because he said to himself. They will be weary. And Absalom is thundering behind. Ready to catch them. When they're at their weakest.

And Barzillai is in front of them. Setting a table. For David. David saw the hand of God. And he said. You prepare a table before me.

In the presence of my enemies. Because circumstances. Do not alter the reality. They don't alter the reality.

And the marvel of divine guidance. And providence. You may know this hymn. We don't sing it. But it's a great hymn. His love in time past. Forbids me to think.

He'll leave me at last. In trouble to sink. Though dark be my way. Since he is my guide. It is mine to obey. It is his to provide.

[13:59] Provision. Provision. Independent of circumstances. In the second half of verse 2. Will you look there with me.

It says he leads me. So children. Where is he? Where is he? Where is the shepherd? In verse 2. Tell your parents now.

He's. He's out in front. Doesn't he? He leads me. He's out there. In front of me. But then. Look at verse 4.

Can you see children? Just where. Where is the shepherd then? He says. Even though I walk through the darkest valley. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil. Where is the shepherd?

Where is he now? For you are with me. He's still in front. Yes. But he's now alongside. And in verse 6.

[14:59] Can you just see. Where he is there? It says. Surely. Goodness. And mercy. Shall follow me. The shepherd is behind.

Bringing up the rear. Watching over. Our back. And our front. So the shepherd. He's out here.

And he's. Here. And he's. Back there. It's a picture isn't it? Of all around. Protective covering. So I can say to you.

With the authority of the word of God. It's alright. This morning. It's alright. The Lord is all around you. Don't panic. The protective covering is sufficient.

We say to children. Don't be picking at things. Just leave it alone. Just leave it alone. It's alright. We can say. In this situation. Despite our tears.

[16:09] And our pain. And our suffering. It's alright. It's alright. He will look after you. And come what may. Can you see. Can you see which way the road leads.

At the end of the psalm. Whatever road you're on. As one of his sheep. As one of his children. It's the road home.

Isn't it? Very often. As you look back. And as you look forward. The road. That we're on. It doesn't make any sense to us. Why this particular twist and turn.

On this road. Why these road works. Healing's full of. Incomprehensible road works. Isn't it? Why is this rough surface. Hard going.

In life. And we don't understand. The road we walk. But do you remember. He leads us. In paths of righteousness.

[17:12] He leads us. In paths of righteousness. All through the word. All the way through the Bible. The word righteousness. Has the same meaning. It's really important. All the way through the Bible. The word righteousness.

Has the same meaning. It comes. In different situations. But it always means. The same thing. And it always means. Listen. It means. That which is right. With God.

Righteousness means. That which is right. With God. It always has that meaning. So what is. The path of righteousness. It's a path.

That makes sense to him. It's a path. That is. Right in his eyes. And we in. Our poor blindness. We say. This doesn't make any sense to me.

Why is this happened? And of course. In our blindness. It doesn't make sense. To us. But it is making sense. To him. And that is what matters. And so we read.

[18:12] In our psalm. Don't we. Can you see it in. Verse six. Surely. My goodness. And mercy. Shall follow me. All the days of my life.

Douglas Macmillan. It's probably. One of the best preachers. I ever hear. He's written a book. On Psalm 23. It's an amazing book. The Lord is our shepherd. And he was a shepherd boy. Before you entered the ministry. I've told you this before.

And he had two sheepdogs. And he called them. Goodness. And mercy. And goodness. And mercy. Would snap at the heels.

Of the sheep. And would pursue them. Goodness. And mercy. Shall follow me. All the days of my life. And I will dwell.

In the house of the Lord. Forever. And to the length. Of days. Literally. David isn't saying. There. All my life long.

[19:08] As some translations have it. That wouldn't have meant sense. To David. The house of the Lord. Actually wasn't built. During David's days. Was it? The house of the Lord. Wasn't built.

Until his son Solomon. Built it. And so. He is looking forward. Isn't he? To that eternal habitation. The New Testament.

Tells us. That we have a house. Not made with hands. Eternal. In the heavens. And every road. Is going straight. Like an arrow. To that house. Jesus says.

In John 14. I am going. To prepare a place. For you. In my father's house. There's plenty of room. And we have that house.

Not made with hands. Eternal in the heavens. And every road. That his sheep are on. Is going straight. Like an arrow.

[20:03] To that house. And we may think. This week. It's twisting. And it's turning. And we may think. Why this? And why that? Why the roughness? Why the hard going?

Why the blockage? Why the sorrow? Why the death? But it's going straight. To the house. Not made with hands. It's going to our father's house.

And the longest way round. Is the shortest way home. And he's leading us by path. And so our brother Norman.

Now dwells in the house. Of the Lord forever. And as he looks back. Over his life. He can say. Goodness and mercy. Have followed me.

All the days of my life. Will you listen. For the trumpets. Can you remember them. This week. I shall not want.

[21:06] I will fear no evil. And I will dwell. In the house of the Lord. Forever. Amen. Amen. Amen.