

More Here Than You Thought

February 10 and 17, 2019

Psalm 23

Pastor Dennis Henley

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. ³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. ⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23 is one of the more familiar and one of the most loved passages in the entire Bible.



It's memorable – I recall as a kid the old flannel graph presentations in Sunday school

The Psalms are unique among the scriptures

*Other books of the Bible are generally **God's Word** to man; the Psalms are **man's word** to God*

The Psalms are the verbal expression of the Hebrew faith: promise, deliverance, power of God

They serve as an inspiration in times of trial and distress

They were written as tools for worship and presented on special occasions, used as anthems

Some are personal prayers offered to God, or as in Ps. 23, a proclamation of faith

Psalm 23 is a favorite because:

It is simple – there is nothing abstract about it; easy to understand

It is realistic – it faces the prospect of dark times and times of trouble – no false hope here, but

it assures us that trouble can be dealt with through the Shepherd's help

It is thankful – it expresses deep appreciation to God for His presence and guidance, recognizing our dependence on God

It sees life as a whole – it demonstrates an everyday walk with God, and views God as being involved in all aspects of our lives

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” - that is, “be in want” or “lacking anything”

The image of shepherd may be a bit archaic to us – I don't know any shepherds; that life style or role isn't something common to us around here – but we understand the role; it reminds us of how God cares for us, as His flock and how He supplies our needs

The sheep are helpless on their own, though they may not realize that, and when we depend on our own resources, we frequently find that to be true in our own lives as well

The shepherd guides the flock in the proper path, leading the sheep to safety, security, provision He uses the rod to defend the sheep from harmful intruders and to occasionally, gently chasten and redirect a wayward sheep, for its own good

From time to time, we need a reminder of what path to take and what to avoid as well

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.”

*Note the **peacefulness** of imagery here*

It's not like an amusement park with all kinds of distractions and stimuli

It's just peace, quiet, green grass, mirror smooth ponds

Another Psalm suggests, “Be still and know that I am God” - “be still” - we need that!

God has given us the gift of the earth and the heavens above, but how much do we notice?

Do you say, “Oh, no” when there is a five inch snowfall, or say, “How beautiful”?

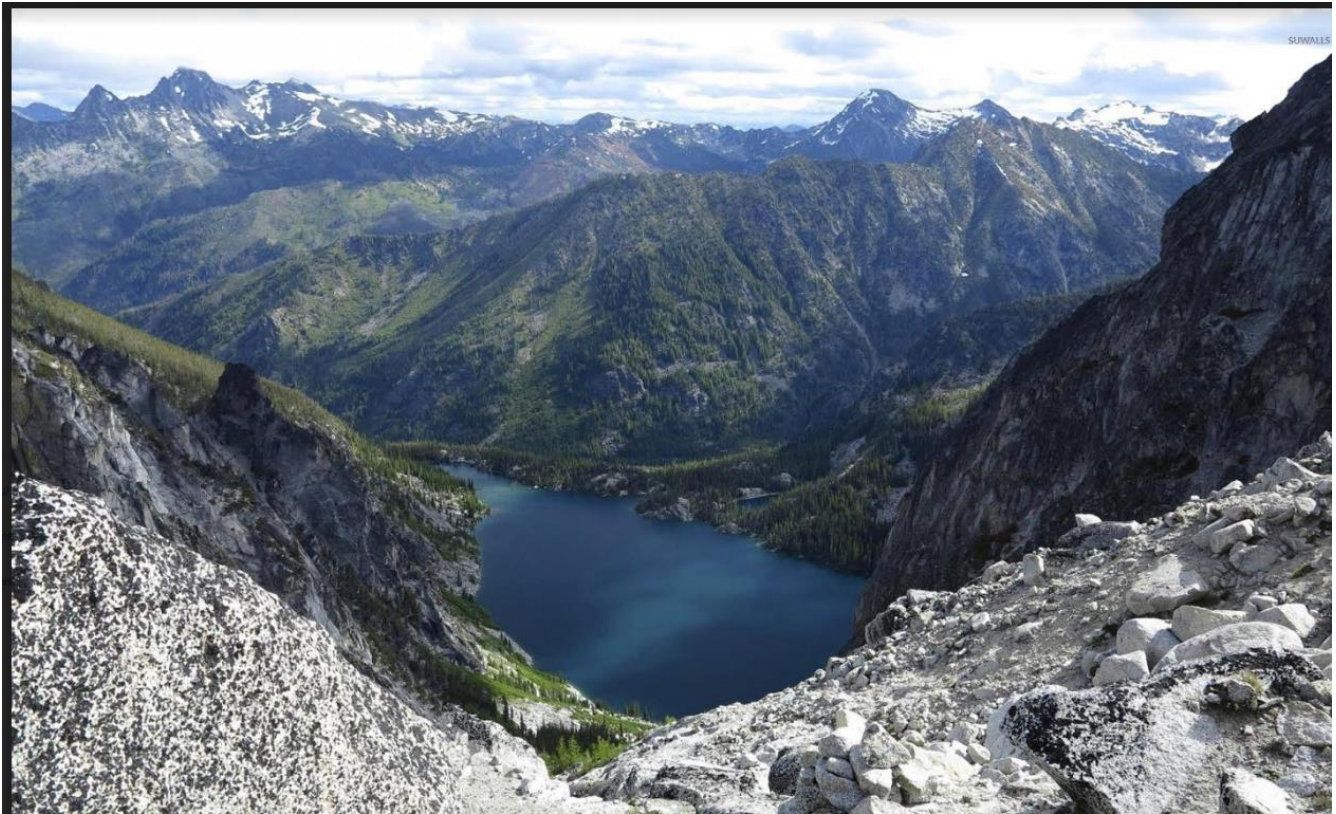
Sometimes nice to get snowed in just to slow things down for a day or two w/o guilt

A walk in the woods, listening to a babbling brook, a gentle summer breeze; all restore and uplift us if we put down the iphone, take out the earbuds and take the time to notice

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake”

*Jesus spoke of the narrow path leading to **eternal life** in Matthew 7:14*

So many are attracted to the seemingly easier way that leads instead to destruction



(Challenging Rocky Mountain National Park roads – lead to great views)

We need a path, a plan for our lives

Leave on a trip somewhere without a plan and you can get very lost

I went on a mission trip to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina – hadn't been there before, knew nothing of it, got really turned around and lost because I didn't have a map or a GPS; it was confusing and frustrating

Meanwhile, another guy in the group, who hadn't ever been there before either, did have a GPS and drove around like a native right up to the mission station

As soon as I got home, I got a GPS! I wised up to the fact I needed more than my own sense of direction

You see both types of people around you every day - some have no plan, no direction and wander around lost and frustrated like me in New Orleans

Others have guidance in their lives and maneuver through the detours without upset
The Good Shepherd can lead us in that fashion pointing us along the path of security and peace

*It's no secret that our society is in disarray – Social issues continue to frustrate us while government seeks solutions that never address the **root causes***

The answers don't need to be complex or expensive, but rather a return to what has worked for generations in the past; that being the guidance of Christian principles

If we would abide by the Ten Commandments, or if that's too much to remember, *John Wesley's Three Simple Rules of “**Do no harm; Do good; Love God**”* we would have a much more stable, encouraging and helpful environment in which to live and work

But instead, we take these simple, proven guidelines off the walls of public buildings and replace them with a “decide for yourself” mentality that lacks stability and direction

It seems we have to hit rock bottom before we rediscover the teachings that offer stability
Right now, our culture seems to be as lost and confused as ever, as we've wandered

away from the shepherd as a society and as individuals and sometimes even as churches

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”
I like historical novels (you can learn so much from history!) and one of the best I've read is
David McCullough's “Johnstown Flood”



It tells about the individuals who experienced that frightful day of May 31, 1889 when 2,209 lives were lost

The book relates a story of a little girl literally carried out of the “valley of death” on the shoulders of her father as the city below was devastated

To the little girl, it was a great adventure because of the strength of her daddy

Fear and death were all around, but she was lifted from it

God would have us put that kind of trust in Him – to know He is there to uphold us in the midst of the chaos, darkness and terror – God was there at the Tree of Life

All the notable persons in the Bible had that sort of relationship with God and in the NT, with Jesus

Noah, Moses, David, the Prophets and later the Disciples to name a few

*“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Here in verse 5 the metaphor changes from **“shepherd” to that of “host”***

In the Middle East in Bible times one could find sanctuary in the house of a friend

No one could enter; you were safe from surrounding enemies

The host would provide lavishly – the cup would overflow

I've come to a new understanding of this verse over time

I used to think of the phrase, "in the presence of my enemies" meaning I'd be sitting at a great banquet while my adversaries were on the outside looking in

Now I think that's wrong – Now I view that as sitting at the table with those who have been adversarial toward me – a scene of reconciliation vs. one of exclusion or punishment – wouldn't that be the greater blessing?

The Psalm wraps up with the thought of goodness and mercy following the faithful individual all the days of his/her life, and a promise of dwelling in God's House forever

*This Psalm is a message of **hope and confidence***

It provides understanding that makes it possible to live a life of blessedness

It's a good Psalm to memorize because it gives us hope and encouragement

It's words lift us up and help see us through

The images might be a little outside our time and culture, yet the words speak to all generations

God is there to provide, protect, guide and inspire us, as we, like the sheep, submit to His care.