

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON– Sunday 6th October 2024 am
TITLE: "Trusting in our Divine Shepherd" TEXT: Psalm 23
Scripture references from the ESV

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ 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.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Most of us do not think too much about where our food comes from, and that is why it is good to have a reminder of harvest each year. Traditionally, it was a time to give thanks to God for his goodness in supplying the harvest. It is he who sovereignly controls the weather, the pests and determines how the seeds grow. It is he who gives strength and wisdom to farmers and food producers, and gives us an income so that we can buy food from the shops.

However, it was not only a time to give thanks to God. It was also a time to show trust in God. This was done by bringing the first fruits of the harvest to the Lord, trusting that having given that away, he would continue to give enough harvest to last the year.

Harvest was a time to recognise God as provider and to renew trust in him to provide.

Throughout the Bible, we see God revealing his character to his people and

the response of his people is to trust him.

- He reveals himself as the provider for our needs, and, in trust, we respond by giving a tithe of our income to the Lord. We give the first slice of our income to him, recognising that it all comes from him anyway, and we trust him through the rest of the month to meet our needs with what is left over.
- He reveals himself to us as our Saviour from sin. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, he puts right the wrong we have done against him and offers Christ's

righteousness as a covering for our sin. Our response is to trust him to forgive us, change us and accept us.

Our faith in God is always a response to how he reveals himself to us.

In Psalm 23, its writer David, first a shepherd and then Israel's king, makes three statements of faith which are based on the character of God. David knows the Lord (God) to be **his** shepherd. Because of that he can say with confidence:

- a) **I shall not want (v1)**. Of course he wants his shepherd, but he lacks nothing he needs in this life.
- b) **I will fear no evil (v4)**. Bad things did happen to David, causing him harm, destruction and sadness, but David could say that he would not fear the evil that causes them because God is **his** shepherd.
- c) **I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (v6)**. Because David has placed himself under the care of his divine shepherd, he has confidence that he will be welcomed as family into God's home, not just for a short time but forever.

What are we to see in our divine shepherd that will enable us to have the same confidence? What do we see in the Lord who cares for us that will enable us to say with David: **I shall not want; I will fear no evil** and I have the assurance that **I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever**. In Psalm 23, we will see that

**Our divine shepherd who cares for us and protects us is
our provider, companion and host.**

- 1) **Our Divine Shepherd is our PROVIDER**, therefore we can say with confidence **I shall not be in want (v1)**. When

we are born, we are completely dependent on our parents, but as we grow, we become less dependent on others.

However, we never become completely independent beings. David speaks of his dependence on the Lord repeatedly in **vv 2-3**, referring to all that God does. In our pride and self reliance, we might like to think that we are independent of God, but in this psalm, David shows us that

Ultimately, everyone is dependent on the Lord to provide.

Unbelievers may not be willing to accept this, but, as believers, we are willing to acknowledge and trust God's provision for our needs. What does he provide?

- a. **God provides rest (v2).** Many of us feel guilty if we are not continually on the go, doing something. Resting feels like wasting the precious resource of time.

God means for us to rest.

We are to rest from the continual cycle of doing, and we are to rest in God and with God, delighting in him. He provides rest by leading us into those places of peace and safety and

making us lie down.

- b. **God provides food and drink (v2).** David tells us that the place where he calls us to rest is in green pastures and by streams of living water, as sheep would do. We are reminded that God cares for our need for food and drink. All that we need to sustain our lives on this earth is provided by our divine shepherd.

That provision extends to both our physical and spiritual needs. In today's world, we have emphasised the importance of the physical to the exclusion of the soul. Psalm 23 reminds us that we are both body and soul and both need to be nourished. Physical food and drink are wonderful gifts from God for us to enjoy and share with those who don't have enough. However, we also need to have our souls restored through feeding on God's word for:

We cannot live on physical bread alone

- c. **God provides for our spiritual wellbeing (v3).** Ask yourself whether your soul is alive to the living God and refreshed in him. When you are spiritually dry, you can come to your divine shepherd, and he will feed you with spiritual food and refresh your soul with spiritual water.

He feeds us with himself.

As the eternal Son of God, Jesus perfectly fulfils the role of divine shepherd. He described himself as **the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world** (John 6:33). Again he says: **If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.** ³⁸ **Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'** ³⁹ **Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, (John 7:37-9).**

Our souls are rested and restored as we fellowship with Christ, listening to him speaking to us in his word, speaking to him in response to what he says, and fellowshiping with him at the Communion table.

As we do that, so he keeps us from wandering away from him and into sinful ways (v3). As God's sheep, we often wander off and get lost, just as sheep do. We stray into patterns of sinful behaviour that result in us feeling lost and distant from the shepherd. Our divine shepherd will not leave us in those places but comes looking for us.

He leads us to live in obedience to him for the sake of his own honour (v3).

God is so committed to his own glory that he will not leave us to wander in sinful paths and sometimes that may mean he has to lead us to dark places where we would rather not go.

2) Our Divine Shepherd is our COMPANION, therefore we can say with confidence:

I will fear no evil (v4). There is a connection between vv3 and 4. Sometimes the shepherd's leading along the paths of righteousness will mean

That we find ourselves in deep dark places.

The shepherd may do this when we are wandering away, but it also happens when we are leading godly lives. In the original, the word death is not there. The image is that of walking through a valley that is so deep that it casts a dark shadow over you. It is a place where there is no light, that is cold and scary, and it is a place where you would rather not be. It might that you are facing death, but it is not necessarily that. There are many other dark places that mean you cannot see how things are going to work out, that leave a chill in your soul that robs you of joy and leave you anxious about the future. These are places where we wish we did not have to go, and yet there is no choice.

- There might be family strife, illness, financial uncertainty, the possibility of uncertainty or perhaps unpopular decisions you must make.

These are all deep, dark places but David is able to say **I will fear no evil (v4)**. He is in his own deep dark places, but he is not going to fear the evil. He is able to say this because he knows his divine shepherd is with him. The Lord is his companion in those places. When we sit with those who are in this deep darkness, we can pray for them that

they will have an awareness of Christ's presence.

When we know the Lord is with us, we can have peace in our hearts. Jesus' disciples found themselves in a violent storm while Jesus slept in the boat. Although this was a place of darkness, Jesus was not anxious. In fear and panic, the disciples woke him, wanting to do something to save them, but before he did anything he asked them: **"Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"** (Matthew 8:26).

They did not need to fear the evil they were facing because Jesus was with them.

Jesus is still with us today, dwelling in us by his Spirit

He is our ever present companion.

- As our shepherd, he does not abandon us but walks out in front of us, saying follow me
- He is our ever present companion, who is ready to strike evil with his rod and to lift us out of danger with his staff

Whatever the evil we face, we do not need to fear it because our divine shepherd is with us. Yet we may still wonder whether all this still holds true when it comes to the powerful enemies we face, and especially the enemy of death.

3. Our Divine Shepherd is our HOST, therefore we can say with confidence: **I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (v6).** It is always a joy when people open their homes to us, offering us a meal with a place to rest, and make us feel part of the family. David shows us how that is a reflection of what our divine shepherd is doing for us (**vv5-6**). The image that David uses throughout the psalm is that of being on a pilgrimage.

This life we are currently experiencing is a pilgrimage

For those of us who come under the care of Jesus, our divine shepherd, we experience him leading us through this life:

- Taking care of our every need
- Giving us rest when we need it
- Keeping us on the right path of obedience
- Sustaining us physically and spiritually
- Staying close to us in the deep dark places

When we look back over our lives, what do we see?

- God's goodness and mercy has been following us every day

As we come to the end of this earthly journey (as we all must), what do we find?

- God opens his home to us and welcomes us, not as guests but as family. He is the perfect host, who refreshes us from the journey with oil, lays out a spread of rich food and drink for us and says this is your eternal home. The world we live in now is merely a departure lounge, though we often strive to make it very comfortable and settle in it.

David assures us that no enemy can rob us of our eternal rest with Christ. Our real fight is not against human enemies, but against sin, Satan and death (Eph 6:12 **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**). It is in the face of these enemies that our divine shepherd lays out the banquet for us, effectively saying to them 'You will not win'.

**Sin, Satan and death will not have the last word over our lives
because they have all been defeated by Jesus.**

Jesus has dealt justly with all our sin, offering his own life to take our punishment. In the process, he has disarmed Satan and all his demons from the hold they had over us. By rising to life, he has cut a way through the valley of death so that

all we now face is the mere shadow of death

A shadow cannot hurt us, and death cannot hurt those who are trusting in Christ's life, death, and resurrection. We can sing with great joy and confidence that:

Our rest is in heaven, our rest is not here

Then why should we tremble when trials draw near?

Be still and remember the worst that can come

But shortens our journey and hastens us home

The worst that can come is death, but it merely shortens our journey so that we can go to our eternal home sooner, and be with Jesus, who loves us and who we love.

- **Our Divine Shepherd is our PROVIDER**, therefore we can say with confidence **I shall not want (v1).**

- Our Divine Shepherd is our **COMPANION**, therefore we can say with confidence: I will fear no evil (v4).
- Our Divine Shepherd is our **HOST**, therefore we can say with confidence: **I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (v6).**

Though, as God's people, we have a corporate identity and learn to love and serve one another, nonetheless we come into the kingdom as individuals.

- Is the divine shepherd that personal to you? Do you know him so intimately that you can say he is **MY** shepherd?

That is possible for you right now and, when that is true for you, you will find that

**life is better under the care of the Divine Shepherd who is
our provider, our companion and our host**