

Psalm 23

Dr. Douglas W. Cho

[Psalm 23: 1-6] The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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

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

4 Yea, 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 runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We see the pre-apocalyptic events prophesied by Lord Jesus unfolding before us during the past few decades. This leads us to believe that the world events are progressing toward the end times according to the timetable that God has set. With this view in mind, I have meditated on Psalm and was encouraged by the protection and blessings God has in store for His faithful.

The main theme that runs through this psalm is that Jehovah God is David's shepherd. David was a shepherd who herded his family's flock as a young boy. There were eight sons in Jesse's family and David was the youngest. Why did Jesse entrust the care of his flock to the youngest? It was because he loved the job and did it in excellent ways. This fact David testified when he stood before King Saul.

[1 Samuel 17: 34-37] But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, 35 I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 Moreover David said, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

This brave young shepherd boy kept his flock from the lions and bears by not being afraid but killing them. His courage came from his full trust in God's protection, which he trusted again when he went against Goliath. God was his Shepherd who keeps him safe from his enemies, leads him to green pastures, and restores his body and soul from wounds of life. So, David declares this belief in the first verse.

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Who is your shepherd? Lord Jesus declared 2,000 years ago that He is the true Shepherd when He saw the people in Israel without a shepherd, being harassed about by false leaders and rulers, suffering the ills of life with no help in sight. To all such people, Jesus is still declaring the same message.

[John 10: 11-12] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.

In the second verse, David sings of sheep's peaceful and blessed state, feeding on green pastures and drinking from still waters.

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

How could a flock of sheep lie down in green pastures and drink from still waters unless the shepherd has fought and killed the ravenous lions, bears, and wolves? Our true Shepherd Jesus will destroy all His enemies in the last days when He comes again so that there will be no wars or military conflicts during the coming millennial kingdom in which He will rule as the King of kings and Lord of lords. And this prophecy is not a fantasy.

[Revelation 19: 19-21] And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

While fleeing from the pursuit of King Saul for several years, David's body and soul suffered from the harshness of the tribulation imposed on him because of Saul's hatred and jealousy against him. Lacking a safe place to hide, David went to Gath, the Philistine capital city, and asked Achish, the king of the Philistines who were the chief enemy of Israel, for the protection of himself, his family, and hundreds of his followers. He even had to faint as a mad man because of the suspicion of Achish's generals who doubted David's intent. It must have been a humiliating and shameful experience for David that deeply hurt his soul. However, the Lord God restored and healed David and set him on the path of righteousness before God and His people.

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

Perhaps you have had experiences like this. Harsh and hurtful consequences came to us because of our foolish decisions. We resorted to worldly ways thinking they would provide a way of escape from the difficulties before us. Yet, Lord God provided a way of escape and set us right in God's truth by forgiving us and restoring our souls. And now we can sing as David sang of God's restoration in his life.

4 Yea, 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.

While fleeing from King Saul's pursuit, David hid himself and his company within the wilderness of Judea amid a maze of deep crevices and rock formations. This was the area where the prophet Elijah fled from the pursuit of the evil Queen Jezebel (2 Kings 19:4), where John the Baptist preached the message of repentance (Luke 3:2-4), and Lord Jesus spent forty days while undergoing temptations of Satan (Matthew 4:1). Some of the rock clefts are deeper than 1,000 feet so finding a person hiding in the maze of such clefts is known to be very difficult. That is why such rock clefts were known as the 'valley of death.' David could find safety while running in the shadow of the death valley from Saul's hot pursuit because Lord God protected him with His rod and staff.

Remembering how he, when he was a shepherd, protected his flock using his staff and rod, David sang of God protecting him with His mighty staff and rod as he was running from the death threats of Saul.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

After Saul was killed in a battle, the people of Juda made David their king. The tribes of Israel also agreed to David's kingship. David ruled the kingdom for ten years from Hebron, conquered Jerusalem, and moved the capital to Jerusalem. He established a tabernacle of God which housed the ark of the covenant. David fought against the Philistines and gained a decisive victory by following the divine direction on how to fight. Thereafter, God sent the prophet Nathan and gave David His covenant, telling him of the wonderful future through obedience to Him. David was much moved by all evidence of God's approval and His initiatives of blessing and giving him the covenant about the kingdom and his family. And he sang as follows to express his gratitude and praise.

[2 Samuel 7:18-20] Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? 19 And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Lord God? 20 Now what more can David say to You? For You, Lord God, know Your servant.

When he said these words, all sufferings, shame, and the death-valley experiences of the past were no longer in David's heart. Instead, there were only gratitude and overwhelming humility for the kindness of God who

had led him thus far. “Who am I, Lord, that You, the Almighty God of heaven and earth, have brought me this far. And yet you tell me what is in store in the future for my house.” I empathize with David’s feelings also. Perhaps we also have had numerous hardships, failures, frustrations, and shameful experiences. But, now the kind God of heaven and earth is showing us the marvelous blessings of eternity in heaven that are our portion through Jesus Christ. And may we offer our songs of gratitude and praise to God as David did. Amen.

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