

August 11, 2024

It's great to be back in the pulpit here at Wall Street! As soon as Pastor Kim asked me if I wanted to be part of the summer series on the Psalms, I laid claim to Psalm 23.

I'd like to thank Pam for the reading from the Passion translation. And thank you to Samia and her team for the musical version of our scripture this morning. It's a beautiful hymn, and it's nice to hear the word of God in a different format sometimes.

Since graduating as a LLWL in the United Church 22 years ago, I've been asked to lead several funerals. That wasn't part of the plan going into the course, but it seems to be something God has equipped me to do. One of the scriptures I often use is the 23rd Psalm. I find that even if you've never been to church before, there's still a good chance you would have heard of Psalm 23. But this is one of those scriptures where you stick pretty close to the King James Version (or maybe New King James) because those are the versions that are familiar. Quite often people will recite it along with me, without a printed version in front of them.

But Psalm 23 isn't reserved for funerals and bedside visits. It is Spirit-inspired, meant to encourage us everyday of our journey with Christ. Six very full verses of 'hope for today and brighter hope for tomorrow!' As popular as the psalm is, there are parts we might not completely understand. And this message today will hopefully give us a little insight into these rich verses.

So where to start? I googled "Preaching the Psalms" and found these insights by researcher Tim Grant. He says that the Book of Psalms, like the whole of the Old Testament, is about Jesus, or pointing us to Jesus. We can't understand the Psalms if we don't read them in the light of the coming Messiah and the fulfilment of God's faithfulness. And Grant says that David wrote the Psalms to give words to people's emotions and to teach them about God. The Book of Psalms covers the full spectrum of human emotions: if you can feel it, you can find a psalm about it.

A friend gave me a study guide on the 23rd Psalm put together by biblical scholar Rick Renner. The miracle here is that I actually read the whole book, and it opened up the passage to me in ways I've never understood before. In the six verses of Psalm 23, Renner highlights 10 promises of God. And we are going to fly through them today. So here goes....

Verse One: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Psalm 23 was written by David, who once tended his father's sheep. So David knew first hand, from experience, the importance of the relationship between shepherd and sheep. David starts the 23rd Psalm ... 'the Lord is MY shepherd', because he knew what it meant to be a shepherd. A good shepherd is a leader, caretaker, protector, guide. A shepherd shows great care and compassion for his flock; just like Jesus cares for us as his flock.

Sheep go astray and get lost. Sheep can be slow to learn, are stubborn, make bad decisions ... and because of these characteristics, they are totally dependent on their shepherd. It may not be a complimentary comparison, but if we're honest we'd have to admit that we share some of these sheepish tendencies ... so we declare our need of our own personal shepherd, in Jesus.

Promise 1 - God's supernatural provision

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." God's first promise to us in this psalm is provision – God's guarantee to provide all our needs.

The phrase "I shall not want" carries the idea of not lacking anything. God repeatedly shows us in scripture that He is our Ultimate provider. Psalm 84:11 "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." What a comfort to know God loves, cares and provides for us!

A young Sunday school girl once tried to recite the psalm and mistakenly said: "The Lord is my Shepherd, that's all I want"! Amazing how right she turned out to be!

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

Promise 2 - God's supernatural protection

Another interesting thing about sheep is that they are easily frightened and put in a state of panic. The only time they lie down is when they feel they are protected from every kind of fear or attack. They have a sense of calmness or confidence only their good shepherd provides.

As we humbly accept Jesus and allow him to be our good shepherd, he will put an end to fear, enabling us to lie down and experience rest in our souls.

Promise 3 - God's supernatural peace

God also promises his peace — a priceless tranquility in our soul, unaffected by outward pressures — even in the middle of traumatic events. David goes on to say that he leads us beside still waters...

“Still waters” brings to mind serenity and tranquility and peace... the kind of peace that passes our understanding.

Verse 3: “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

Promise 4 - God’s supernatural restoration

As our Good Shepherd, the Lord promises to restore our soul. His restoration is a full-scale rescue operation that results in total redemption and wholeness in Him. One thing we can all agree on is that we are living in a broken world, and it can often take a toll on our lives.

We are blessed here at Wall Street because we get to witness God’s restoration power on a regular basis. At our evening Celebrate Life service we hear testimonies of how people have overcome their hurts and life struggles with God’s help, and we witness how God has brought restoration in their lives. And we are all encouraged in the sharing of these victories.

Promise 5 - God’s supernatural guidance

... on those ‘paths of righteousness’. There are so many ways God can guide us. The Bible is full of instruction and guidance as we seek to be on the path he chooses for us. Holy Spirit is also pretty good at planting those seeds in our minds and giving us the feeling that we are on the right path.

A quick story. Two weeks ago, I spoke at St. Paul’s United in Prescott and my message was called “Shoulder Taps and God Nudges”. A woman came to me after the service. She had just lost her husband that week, and she told me how she went into her garden shed and how the door shut and locked behind her, and she couldn’t get out.

She sat down on her lawn mower in her grief and frustration and called out, ‘What am I supposed to do now? I don’t need this!’ Then she said she felt a physical tap on her shoulder and heard a non-audible voice reminding her; “There is a back door!” She had forgotten, there was another door... they never used it. But it was easy to break off the old latch, and she got out. She said she recognized that tap and voice as God helping her. God does guide us in many ways.

Verse 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.”

Promise 6 - God’s supernatural confidence

One of the greatest promises of God is to be with us at all times. Knowing this is the greatest source of confidence we will ever have. Notice in this verse that David walks through the valley, he doesn’t stay there. We all have dark moments, but knowing God is with us and will never leave us, gives us solid confidence that we can make it through anything.

Since the passing of Doug Warren last weekend, I’ve been looking back at pictures from 2009 when I travelled to Kenya as a representative of Our Kenyan Kids — the charity which Doug founded 20 years ago. We had been asked to check out a potential new project for OKKIDS to support, and on the way, we stopped to purchase some basic food items as a gift.



This is Pastor Doug entering the Watoto Wema Centre. Their leaders told us that their food barrels were empty before we arrived, and how they had prayed for God to provide, and had every confidence that God would deliver.

As we unloaded our van, we realized that ‘we’ were the answer to their prayer. I still recall the big smiles as the little ones helped to carry in the food. A just-in-time provision for that day!

This was a humbling experience I’ll never forget, and a lesson in confident faith — God will hear and answer our prayers.



Promise 7 - God's supernatural correction

.... *'your rod and your staff, they comfort me...'*

This is likely the coolest thing I read while researching this passage.

I always wondered how God's 'rod and staff' would "comfort" me. Simply, the 'rod and staff' in the hand of the Shepherd are for protection and correction. The shepherd uses the rod to protect and his staff to rescue and guide.

Verse 5 (a): You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

Promise 8 - God's supernatural prosperity

An excerpt from Louie Giglio's book: *'Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table'*.

'God has prepared a table in the middle of the battle. That table is laden with the richest of fare - and it's all good food for us to eat - yet that table is set right in the middle of the chemo ward. God invites us to come and dine with him - yet that table might be in the middle of a family dispute or in the middle of job stress. It's directly at the center of hardships, arguments, misunderstandings, depression and even death. Right in the middle of all the calamity and strife, the God of heaven calls you by name and says ' Please sit down.'

He doesn't promise to eliminate conflict. He hasn't removed you from the reality of trouble. But he has promised to prepare a table for you in the presence of your enemies. It's all about who you're at the table with.

Verse 5 (b): "You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over."

Promise 9- God's supernatural anointing

Have you ever heard someone say, "That man is an "anointed speaker", or that woman is an "anointed singer"? It's a word we often use in our "Christian-ese" language.

The anointing of God is available to all of us. When you are anointed by God, He places his hands on your life, and others can see the difference. God will bring you to higher levels of anointing as you grow in Him and follow His ways.

Rather than receiving a small amount of anointing, this verse ends pointing out that our cup overflows or runs over. This symbolizes God's extravagant, overflowing love for you.

Verse 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."

Promise 10 - God's supernatural promise

Because of his experience, David believed, without question, that God's grace, goodness and mercy would follow him all the days of his life. David also knew his relationship with God was a forever relationship. He knew he would spend eternity with his Shepherd.

God was in it for the long haul with David, and the same is true for us. The moment we accept Jesus as our Lord, we begin a forever relationship with the Creator of Heaven, and we are promised to spend eternity with our good Shepherd, dwelling in the House of the Lord, forever!

May these promises found in the 23rd Psalm give you a deeper understanding, encourage you and give you hope.

Thanks be to God for his promises, rich and full. Thanks be to Jesus, our shepherd.
Amen