

## PSALM 23 – May 17, 2020

Psalm 23 is the most famous Psalm ever. It has been read and quoted millions and millions of times for the past 3000 years, ever since David wrote it; and no doubt millions and millions of people have been encouraged by the truths and promises in this Psalm. Now today I want to explain what it means, so it can be of personal benefit and blessing to your life.

But first, I want to make some introductory statements about this Psalm:

1. It is relevant – it can meet the needs of every single believer, every single Christian. Every person can relate to what this Psalm is talking about and be encouraged by it.
2. It is short – people like reading things that are short, but yet it is packed with truth.
3. It is personal. Now you know it's personal because the words "*I, me, my*" are stated 18 different times. And the words "*Lord, He, You, Your*" are stated 12 different times. That it's written this way means this Psalm is about you and God, you and your relationship with God. God is a personal God and your relationship with God is just between you and Him.
4. The tense of this Psalm is in the present tense. It is not in the past, and not in the future, and therefore, it is relevant for your life right now, and for what you're going thru today.
5. This Psalm is about how God loves you and cares for you. It doesn't talk about what you need to do for God or what you need to do for others, but rather it's all about what He does for you. And as people, we like to be cared for, and served, and loved in this way.
6. It is a very encouraging and comforting Psalm, and in many different ways in these six verses, it expresses the great and personal love that God has for you.

Psalm 23:1. This Psalm is about how the Lord is our shepherd, which means we are his sheep. Now David was a shepherd, and so he understood sheep, and he understood what it meant to be a shepherd. Now David knew sheep weren't so smart, could easily go astray, could easily get into trouble, and couldn't help themselves. That is, sheep were needy animals, and needed a shepherd, and so too, believers are like sheep and are needy, are ones who need a shepherd.

Now right away, David says, "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" And so, we see that this Psalm is personal, for David was saying that the Lord is "*my*" shepherd – He saw that the Lord would personally care for him, personally watch over him, and personally meet his needs. And it's important for you as to know and believe this, that God Himself will watch over you, will personally care for you, will meet your needs. And so, every day you want to get up and think about how you need the Lord, and how you know that He will take care of you.

Now it says Lord, which is a most amazing truth, that the Lord Himself, the Lord Jehovah, the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of the world, will care for you. The Lord made you, and therefore knows you inside and out and He alone knows how to care for you, can care for you and wants to care for you. And He knows the plans He has for you.

Psalm 23:1. Then it says, *"I shall not want."* The point is clearly made, that if the Lord is truly your shepherd, than all your needs will be met, you won't need anything else, you will be completely satisfied and content, and that's really good news. All of you go thru life, and there are times when you feel empty, and you want someone or something to meet your needs, but only God can do that. Jeremiah 2:4-5, John 10:11, 14

Psalm 23:2. We read about pastures and waters. Now of course a good shepherd knows where the good food is at, and we read here of green pastures - it is not dry old grass, but green grass, fresh grass, nutritious grass. And the water is quiet water, not rushing turbulent water, not water stirred up with dirt and sand mixed in. - And so too, the Lord, as our Shepherd, not only knows what our spiritual needs are but knows how to meet our spiritual needs. And this is important, for as believers, we don't always know what we need, we don't always know our needs, but the good shepherd does, and we but need to look to Him and He will meet our needs. And the spiritual food and water God has for us is not junk food, it is the best spiritual food and water there is - it is that which really satisfies us and meets our needs.

We also see that the Lord makes us lie down. The idea is that God knows when we need to eat, and He knows how to make us lie down. Sometimes we are going along, and God has to stop us, and get our attention, and make us lie down. And we see that He leads us to water - we don't know how to get it, but He does. And the point I am making is not that we can't read our Bible every day, but that the Lord knows your present need as a Christian, what you need today, and He knows how you can get the food, and that you can be spiritually nourished by it (John 6:35). Just as there all kinds of good foods out there, and you all know what they are, so too God knows the specific kind of spiritual food you need. Truths, commands, promises

Psalm 23:3. The Lord is the One who can restore your soul. No one else can do this. The word restore means to turn back. Let's say you are going down the wrong path, and you need to be turned back so you don't get hurt by the enemy, so you don't spiritually starve, so you don't continue in sin. And the Lord is the only one who can restore you, can bring you back to Himself, so you can be truly fed, be holy, be protected and be strengthened. - Then we read that He guides you. God is your guide - He knows where to lead you in life, He knows the plans, the paths He has for you. And these would be like well-worn paths that sheep or cattle would walk on. God does not lead you thru the woods, thru the brush, thru the weeds, He leads you on paths, and they're smooth, and you can easily walk on them.

And these are paths of righteousness. These paths have direction, have purpose, and relate to you doing what God wants you to do, and these are the right things to do, the holy things to do, not things that are wrong or evil or sinful, but righteous. Proverbs 4:18. Then we read this most important phrase - *"for His Name's sake."* Life is not about us, about what we want to do, but about God's purposes, and about God getting glory. Psalm 25:11

Psalm 23:4 – Shepherds would take their sheep through valleys to get to good food sources, and these valleys in the morning and evening would be dark places, places where predators would be, where wolves and other animals would want to attack and eat them. The words death and evil are used to mean that there is danger for Christians, danger from the world and the devil, not that we can lose our salvation, but we can get spiritually hurt, we can get sidetracked and be made useless for God (1 Peter 5:8). And so, there's a lot of danger out there for the Christian, but what's encouraging is that the Shepherd is always with you - He never leaves His sheep day or night. A very natural tendency of sheep is to be afraid, to get spooked, but you don't ever need to be afraid because you know God will be with you and watch over you and protect you from the enemy.

Now this rod was a short solid piece of wood, like a club, and it was used to hit unruly sheep, or used to hurl at predatory animals who were attacking sheep. And the staff was a longer piece of wood, not as thick, and it often had a crook at the end, and it was used to herd the animals, guide them, separate them, or help them get up if they were downcast. (Matt. 9:36). Note that it says, "*comfort*." That is, the rod and staff were instruments of love, even though they were disciplinary - they were how the shepherd loved his sheep, by protecting them, by correcting them if they were getting out of hand. And so too, the Lord has his means of helping us, of disciplining us, of protecting us, and all are means of His love, of His comfort.

Psalm 23:5. The word table is referring to a table of land, a relatively flat piece of land up in the high ground. In the summertime the shepherds would take their sheep up to this table of land, and it was where the best food would be found. But we see that there were still enemies around who would love to get these sheep for their food. And so too, the Lord is the One who spiritually feeds us, and wherever we are at, in whatever situation we are in, the Lord our Shepherd gives us all the food we need, and the best food too; and of course, He protects us from all our enemies.

We read that He anoints our head with oil. Now with sheep, the oil was used to protect their heads from gnats and bugs, for this oil would keep them away. Now in Mideastern culture, when you had a guest come over, you were to anoint them with oil – it would be a fragrant, nice-smelling oil, a refreshing and soothing oil (Luke 7:46). And so too, God anoints your head with oil, a symbol of His grace and blessing upon your life. It was also symbolic of the Spirit's presence, influence and power in your life. John 14:16-17

Then we read, "*My cup overflows*." John 4:14, John 7:37-38. All that we have talked about today, the Lord being your shepherd, the Lord providing spiritual food and water, the Lord leading you, guiding you and protecting you, the Lord restoring your life, the Lord anointing your head with oil – all this results in your cup overflowing. "*I am*" – John's gospel

That your cup overflows means you're filled up with goodness, love, peace and joy. And you're not just filled up, but are overflowing, the overflow then affecting others around us. God wants to bless you so that it affects other people around you. God blesses you so you can be a blessing to others. God doesn't want you empty but overflowing so you are filled up and satisfied, and so others are blessed by the life of Christ that flows from your life. 2 Cor. 1

Psalm 23:6. This final vs is one of the most well-known and popular vss in the entire Bible. It says surely, a word that means indeed, certainly, truly; and therefore, what is said after this is certainly, truly going to happen. It says goodness and mercy, two words that are very similar. Now the word goodness could refer to the fact that God wants to bless you, that God wants to give you what is good. And the word mercy could refer more to the fact that God is forgiving and merciful – that He does not give us what we deserve. But in general, they mean favor, blessing, kindness – or you could simply say His love for you.

Then it says follow, a word that literally means pursue or chase after. The fact is that God really loves you and wants to show you His love, so much so that He is pursuing you, coming after you all day long, staying close to you, so He can show His love to you and keep showing His love to you. Then it says all the days of your life. God is going to show you His goodness and love every day of your life. You get up in the morning and you can expect God to show you His love that day. And at night, before you go to bed, look back and you will see just how God showed you His love. God is going to love you all day long and every day of your life.

Then it says *"and"*, a word that means there is more than just this life, a word that connects this life to the next life. This life is short, only 70-80-90 years or so, and then you die, but you don't just cease to exist, you are immediately and quickly escorted, taken to heaven to be with Jesus, and to live in the house of the Lord forever. Now it says dwell, a word that means *"to settle."* This house in heaven is your permanent home and you will settle down there, and you live there forever. In heaven you will be in your home, and you will be with Jesus, the angels, and all the believers. And you will be perfect, you will have a powerful, immortal, glorious and spiritual body. John 14:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:18, Hebrews 12:22-24

This whole Psalm is really good news, great news, a Psalm that tells you the truth, and specifically the truth about how the Lord is your shepherd, and how He loves you and takes care of you, and will be with you and bless you forever and ever. Psalm 23:1, 6