

The Twenty Third Psalm
(Study #3)

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Introduction

1. Verse 2:
 - (1) "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."
 - (2) "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

2. Again: The sweetest little song that ever sounded on this earth.

3. Two different worlds:
 - (1) The world in which David sang this song.
 - (2) The world in which we sing it.

4. A song of the changeables:
 - (1) David's world is far removed from our world.
 - (2) Our world is separated from David's world by more than 3000 years of change.
 - (3) Changes which have been vast, and deep, and broad, and brutal.
 - (4) Today, in our world, the speed of change is sometimes vicious and frightening.
 - (5) Again and again, we are forced to come to grips with that which is inevitable: Change!
 - (6) Some things can be changed.
 - (7) Some things should be changed.
 - (8) Some things are being changed.
 - (9) Some things will yet be changed.
 - (10) But, thank God, some things are unchangeable!

5. A song of the unchangeables:

- (1) God. "I am the Lord, I change not." (Mal. 3:6)
- (2) Christ's unchangeable priesthood. (Heb. 7:24)
- (3) God's concern for his own.
- (4) God's love for his own.
- (5) God's presence among his own.
- (6) God's promises to his own.
- (7) God's provision for his own.
- (8) Human nature.
- (9) Human emotions.
- (10) Human needs.

6. A song of the depths:

- (1) In the main, modern life is shallow.
- (2) Modern life progressively becomes more shallow.
- (3) The overwhelming majority of us live in the shallows.
- (4) With our shallow conceptions.
- (5) And our shallow ideals.
- (6) And our shallow practices.
- (7) And our shallow satisfactions.
- (8) And our shallow heroes.
- (9) And our shallow faith.
- (10) And our shallow convictions.
- (11) And our shallow dedication.
- (12) David effectively reminds us: We cannot scale the heights without first going down into the depths; we cannot go higher until we go deeper.
- (13) In this little song we catch the echo of Christ's gentle words to his weary and disappointed disciples: "Launch out into the deep." (Luke 5:4)

7. A song of the indomitables;

- (1) "I will fear no evil." (v-4)
- (2) David's declaration gives courage and strength to all wayfaring pilgrims.

- (3) It inspires reluctant emigrants to become indomitable pioneers.
- (4) "Indomitable" is basically defined as "Those who have not been broken and tamed."
- (5) Those who are not easily discouraged.
- (6) Those who are exceedingly difficult to defeat.
- (7) Those who are valiant and dauntless.
- (8) Those who are unyielding in integrity and principle.
- (9) Those whose heads may be bloodied, but whose knees will not be bowed.
- (10) Those stouthearted, indomitable, and unconquerable pilgrims of faith whose mental and emotional dictionaries do not contain such words as "compromise" or "surrender."

8. The setting of this psalm:

- (1) A scorching Middle Eastern high noon.
- (2) The air is oppressive with stifling heat.
- (3) The land is baking, as if in a gigantic oven.
- (4) The rocks are sizzling and searing with heat.
- (5) Woe to the flock without a shepherd!
- (6) Woe to the shepherd who could not find shelter!
- (7) In this verse, the shepherd has found a green valley and the sheep have laid down to rest.

9. Again:

- (1) "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."
- (2) "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

10. In a somewhat subtle and indirect manner, this verse suggests three things that are necessary before sheep or souls can rest.

I. A Consciousness of Safety

1. The statement of faith and fact:

- (1) "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."
- (2) "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

2. The emphasis:

- (1) All need rest.
- (2) There must be pauses in every life.
- (3) The brain cannot forever be strained.
- (4) The emotions cannot forever be burdened.
- (5) The hand cannot forever be plying at toil.

- (6) We cannot forever be climbing high mountains and crossing deep valleys.
- (7) Sometimes we must pause and allow our minds, and emotions, and hands, and bodies, and hearts, and souls to lie down and rest.
- (8) Rest is necessary for sheep.
- (9) Rest is necessary for the human body.
- (10) Rest is necessary for the human soul.

3. The fragile condition:

- (1) The bark of one wolf or jackal could rob the flock of its rest.
- (2) One nagging doubt or fear can rob the soul of its rest.

4. The question:

- (1) How could the shepherd rest if one sheep had wandered away, and was lost?
- (2) How can we rest if the eternal destiny of loved ones, or friends, lies unsettled?
- (3) How can a human soul be assured of eternal safety?

5. The answer:

- (1) At the cross, a way was made for the eternal safety of our souls.
- (2) In his death, Jesus destroyed the power of the adversary of our soul.

- (3) O Lord our Lord, that awful conflict!
- (4) Into that unearthly collision between heaven and hell, we could not enter.
- (5) For we were the prize for which that bloody battle was fought.
- (6) The scars of his wounds shall never fade.
- (7) The crimson stain of his blood shall never dim.
- (8) The full agony of his suffering shall never be measured.
- (9) The fathomless depths of his sorrow shall never be plumbed.
- (10) The illimitable scope of his love shall never be calculated.
- (11) The haunting sounds of his cries shall never be silenced.
- (12) The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep!

6. The incontestable facts:

- (1) The Son of God suffered and died!
- (2) And in his death, he destroyed the power of our adversary.
- (3) In the Snowy Range Mountains in Wyoming, I saw a mountain lion and a bull elk lying side by side in death. The elk had died, but in dying it had destroyed its adversary.
- (4) Jesus suffered all there was to suffer in that world.
- (5) He suffered all there is to suffer in this world.
- (6) Then, after his death and burial, "The God of peace brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the Sheep." (Heb. 13:20)
- (7) He now lives to guarantee the safety of our souls, and to intercede for us. (Heb. 7:25)

7. Because of this, we may triumphantly cry:

- (1) "I will lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety." (Psa. 4:8)
- (2) "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." (Isa. 54:17)
- (3) "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Mat. 5:10)

- (4) "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31)
- (5) "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33)
- (6) "Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. 8:34)
- (7) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35)
- (8) "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:37)
- (9) "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God." (Rom. 8:38-39)
- (10) "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (Rev. 19:6)

8. O, weary soul, be at rest:

- (1) You are safe!
- (2) His blood-red banner is over you!
- (3) He who has done so much for you in the past will not forsake you now!
- (4) Patiently peruse the promises of our providential God.
- (5) Listen to the lullaby of the Good Shepherd.

9. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters."

10. The first necessity is: A consciousness of safety; and the second necessity is:

II. A Sufficiency of Food

1. Again:

- (1) "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."
- (2) "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

2. Inalterable truths:

- (1) A hungry sheep is a restless sheep.
- (2) A hungry soul is a restless soul.

- (3) A faithful shepherd will provide a sufficiency of food for his hungry sheep.
 - (4) Our Good Shepherd will provide a sufficiency of food for our hungry souls.
3. The effects of sufficient food:
 - (1) The sheep will lie down in contentment.
 - (2) Though birds may light upon their wooly backs;
 - (3) Though bees may murmur around their drowsy heads;
 - (4) The sheep will sleep and rest.
4. The human heart can never rest as long as its soul-hunger is unsatisfied.
5. Biblical examples of soul-hunger:
 - (1) "By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willow trees, for how could we sing the Lord's song when we were captives in a foreign land?" (Psa. 137:1-4)
 - (2) "As the hart panteth after the water brooks; so panteth my soul after thee, O God." (Psa. 42:1)
 - (3) "They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled." (Mat. 5:6)
6. When God gave us life, he put something deep down in our souls that can never be satisfied until it is satisfied in God.
7. The entire drift of human life is vitally affected by the aching hunger of the soul.
8. There was no consoling answer for the hunger of the soul until Jesus said: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Mat. 11:28-29)

9. David's green pastures and still waters:

- (1) David memorialized these two shepherd-related phrases, "green pastures" and "still waters," and made them unspeakably dear to all succeeding generations.
- (2) He used these phrases as reverent expressions of his thanksgiving for God's bountiful blessing upon him all the days of his life.

10. Our green pastures and still waters:

- (1) Among our many "green pastures" and "still waters," among our many expressions of thanksgiving for God's bountiful blessings upon our lives, would be:
- (2) God's greatest gift: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son."
- (3) God's holy word, the Bible.
- (4) The Lord's day, and the Lord's house.
- (5) Memories of answered prayers.
- (6) Memories of undeserved blessings.
- (7) Family, home, health and happiness.
- (8) The love and faithfulness of friends.
- (9) Times of convalescence after serious illness, adversity, sorrow and suffering.
- (10) The nourishing messages and spellbinding displays of nature.

11. Under the Good Shepherd's care:

- (1) We find food in the green pastures.
- (2) We drink from the still waters.
- (3) We rest in the shadow of the Great Rock in a weary land.
(Isa. 32:2)
- (4) We find comfort, and hope, and peace.

12. In the Catacombs in Rome:

- (1) Again, and again, and again, I saw: "In Christo: In pace."
- (2) Translation: "In Christ: In peace."

13. The third necessity for soul rest is:

III. Obedience To The Shepherd

1. Two consoling assurances:

- (1) "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."
- (2) "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

2. Two cardinal truths:

- (1) The shepherd cannot lead his flock to green pastures and still waters unless they will obey him.
- (2) God cannot lead his children to peace and rest unless they will obey him.

3. The Bible magnifies obedience:

- (1) "To obey is better than sacrifice." (I Sam. 15:22)
- (2) "If you are obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land." (Isa. 1:19)
- (3) "But if you rebel, you shall be destroyed." (Isa. 1:20)
- (4) "By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners." (Rom. 5:19)
- (5) "By faith, Abraham obeyed the Lord." (Heb. 11:8)

4. Some causes of disobedience:

- (1) Insisting on our "rights."
- (2) Demanding to have our way.
- (3) Lagging behind fellow pilgrims.
- (4) Falling in love with the world.
- (5) Overcrowding life with "things."

- (6) Nibbling at forbidden things.
 - (7) The influence of others: Let just one sheep, or one Christian, rebel and scores of others will follow after him.
5. Some results of disobedience:
- (1) Discontent.
 - (2) Criticism.
 - (3) Rebellion.
 - (4) Blaming others.
 - (5) Leading others astray.
 - (6) Missing the green pastures.
 - (7) Missing the still waters.
 - (8) Causing the shepherd great anguish.
 - (9) Self-justification.
 - (10) Never finding rest.
 - (11) There is no rest for disobedient sheep.
 - (12) There is no rest for disobedient souls.
6. The divine compulsion:
- (1) "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."
 - (2) Derivatives from "maketh:"
 - (a) Level.
 - (b) Equalize.
 - (c) Counterbalance.
 - (3) Thus, we may say:
 - (a) God levels my life.
 - (b) God equalizes my needs.
 - (c) God gives me a counterbalance.
 - (4) Sometimes by gentle persuasion:
 - (a) Closed doors.
 - (b) Patient entreaties.

- (c) Loving kindness.
- (d) Tender mercies.
- (e) Long-suffering love.

(5) Sometimes by firm compulsions:

- (a) Divine wrath. (Psa. 2:7)
- (b) Crushing burdens.
- (c) Inconsolable sorrow.
- (d) Agonizing suffering.
- (e) Total abasement. (Dan 4:31-34)

7. O Lord our Lord! Lead me to obey, or make me to obey!

Conclusion



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