

The Twenty Third Psalm
(Study #5)

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Introduction

1. Verse 3: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."
2. Again: The sweetest little song that ever sounded on this earth.
3. Speculations and guesses:
 - (1) That David, prior to writing this psalm, had suffered through a severe illness, and had been restored to health.
 - (2) That he had been attacked by vicious enemies, and had triumphed over them.
 - (3) That he had fallen prey to a scarlet sin, and had been forgiven.
 - (4) That he had written this psalm to thank and praise God.
4. The three divisions:
 - (1) The shepherd and the sheep. (verses 1-2)
 - (2) The guide and the travelers. (verses 3-4)
 - (3) The host and the guests. (verses 5-6)
5. The background:
 - (1) A dark and lonely night.
 - (2) The shepherd and the flock bedded down in an unprotected field.
 - (3) Howling wolves, bears, jackals and hyenas all around them.
 - (4) A frightened and restless flock.
 - (5) A sleepless and concerned shepherd standing watch over his flock, waiting for the first light of morning.

6. David cried: "That's the way the Lord has shepherded me!"
7. The three specifics in verse 3:
 - (1) "He leadeth me."
 - (2) "Paths of righteousness."
 - (3) "For his name's sake."
8. The emphasis in this study:
 - (1) "He leadeth me."
 - (2) "Leadeth" links two personal pronouns: "He" and "me."
9. The premise: The Good Shepherd leads the flock, and never drives them.
10. The conclusion: Leadership requires followship; and followship requires:

I. A Willingness To Be Led

1. The tendency of some sheep:
 - (1) To be the leader, not a follower.
 - (2) To run ahead of the shepherd and the flock.
 - (3) To lag behind.
 - (4) To stray away from the flock.
 - (5) To forage off to the right or left.
 - (6) To snatch at forbidden things.
 - (7) To nibble themselves away from the flock and the shepherd.
2. The tendency of many of us:
 - (1) To be the leader, not a follower.
 - (2) To choose our own place, instead of asking where God wants us.

- (3) To rush ahead of God.
- (4) To lag behind.
- (5) To stray away from the flock.
- (6) To forage off into forbidden territories.
- (7) To think that there is something outside of God's will that is worth snatching at.
- (8) To think that we can do better for ourselves than God can do for us.
- (9) To nibble ourselves away from God and fellow believers.
- (10) To waste precious time before learning that the place of blessedness is behind the shepherd.

3. Some Biblical calls to fellowship:

- (1) Elijah: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be God, follow him!" (I Kings 18:21)
- (2) Hosea: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know." (Hosea 6:3)
- (3) Jesus: "Jesus said unto his disciples: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mat. 16:24)
- (4) John: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. (Rev. 14:4)

4. In New Testament times:

- (1) Jesus was physically present with his disciples.
- (2) He walked ahead of them. (Mark 10:32)
- (3) They could follow him by sight.

5. In our time:

- (1) Jesus is no longer physically in our midst.
- (2) We cannot follow him by sight.
- (3) We must follow him by faith.

6. This is an overwhelming and humbling promise: "He leadeth me."
7. O Lord our Lord! If I am not willing to follow you, make me willing to be made willing!

II. An Understanding of God's Leading

1. By studying Biblical examples:

(1) Abraham:

- (a) In Ur of the Chaldees, God said to Abraham: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."
(Gen. 12:1)
- (b) "And Abraham departed as the Lord had spoken unto him." (Gen. 12:4)

(2) Moses:

- (a) At the burning bush, God said to Moses: "I will send you unto Pharaoh, that you may bring my people out of Egypt." (Exo. 3:10)
- (b) "And Moses took his wife and sons, and set them upon an ass, and returned to the Land of Egypt." Exo. 4:20)

(3) Caleb:

- (a) Regarding Caleb, God said: "All of the land that his feet have trodden upon, I will give unto him and his children." (Deu. 1:36)
- (b) "Because he has wholly followed the Lord." (Deu. 1:36)

(4) Gideon:

- (a) God said to Gideon: "Destroy thy father's alter of Baal, and chop down the grove that is by it; and built an altar unto the Lord upon the top of this rock."
(Jud. 6:26-27)
- (b) "And Gideon did as the Lord had said unto him."
(Jud. 6:27)

(5) Matthew:

- (a) "Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him: Follow me."
(Mat. 9:9)
- (b) "And he arose and followed him." (Mat. 9:9)

(6) Philip:

- (a) "God said to Philip: "Arise and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza." (Acts 8:26)
- (b) "And Philip arose and went." (Acts 8:27)

(7) Paul:

- (a) In the miraculous vision on the Damascus road, Jesus said to Paul: "I send you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin." (Acts 26:18)
- (b) To Agrippa, Paul said: "I was not disobedient to that heavenly vision." (Acts 26:19)

2. By divinely-appointed helps:

- (1) God's Holy Spirit.
- (2) God's word.

- (3) God's love.
 - (4) Conscience.
 - (5) Song, sermon and worship.
 - (6) The love and counsel of friends.
 - (7) Prayer.
3. Many analyses and comparisons link the journey of the children of Israel through the Sinai wilderness with our modern pilgrimage of faith; which include:
4. Dramatic departures:
- (1) Their dramatic departure: Immediately after the Passover, in the darkness of night. (Exo. 12:40-41)
 - (2) Our dramatic departure on our pilgrimage of faith: Immediately after the hour of our forgiveness and salvation.
5. Detours:
- (1) Their detour: God led them around the land of the fierce Philistines, lest they see war and return to Egypt. (Exo. 13:17)
 - (2) Our detours: In his infinite wisdom, God detours us around many unknown dangers and difficulties.
6. Divine direction:
- (1) For them: The pillar of fire, and the pillar of cloud. (Exo. 13:21)
 - (2) For us: God's Holy Spirit, and God's holy word.
7. Divine deliverance:
- (1) For them: God parted the waters of the Red Sea, and delivered them from death at the hands of the pursuing Egyptians. (Exo. 14:13-22)

- (2) For us: God gave his only Son to deliver us from eternal death.
8. Doxologies:
- (1) Their doxologies: On the Sinai shore of the Red Sea, they sang doxologies of thanksgiving and praise to God for their salvation and safety. (Exo. 15:1-21)
- (2) Our doxologies: Our never-ceasing doxologies of thanksgiving and praise for our salvation, and for eternal life.
9. Disappointments:
- (1) Their disappointment: The bitter waters of Marah, which God sweetened with a special tree. (Exo. 15:22-25)
- (2) Our disappointments: Which God sweetens with the special tree upon which Christ died.
10. Delights:
- (1) Their delight: Weary, worn, and half-starved, they arrived at Elim; where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. (Exo. 15:27)
- (2) Our delights: God's presence, promises, providence, loving kindness and tender mercies.
- 11: Dry water holes:
- (1) Their dry water holes: At Meribah, the wells were all dry, and God miraculously turned the rock into a pool of water. (Exo. 17:10-7) (Num. 20:1-13)
- (2) Our dry water holes: God sometimes turns our rocks of Marah into pools of sweet water.

12. Delays:

- (1) Their delay: At Hazeroth, Miriam criticized Moses, was stricken with leprosy, was shut out of the camp for seven days, "And the people journeyed not until Miriam was brought in again. (Num. 12:1-16)
- (2) Our delays: The progress of the church and the kingdom of God is sometimes delayed by our criticism, murmuring and quarreling.

13. Destinations:

- (1) Their destination: After forty years of wilderness wanderings, the children of Israel crossed the Jordan river and camped at Gilgal; where all signs of the wilderness were rolled away. (Joshua 4:19)
- (2) Our destination: In the fullness of God's own time, we shall leave this earth and enter into heaven, our final destination, where God shall roll away every sign of this world and wipe every tear from our eyes; and where there shall be no more sorrow, suffering, crying, pain, sickness nor death.

14. Realities of the pathway home:

- (1) Raging, boiling and foaming torrents.
- (2) Stormy mountain steeps.
- (3) The valley of the shadow of death.
- (4) Green pastures.
- (5) Still waters.
- (6) Paths of righteousness.
- (7) The presence of God.
- (8) Brimming banquet tables.
- (9) Overflowing cups.
- (10) Goodness and mercy.

15. Promise: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

16. Our comfort and assurance: "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." (Psa. 1:6)

III. A Confidence in God's Leading

1. A confidence:

- (1) That God will always lead those who are willing to follow him.
- (2) That God will always lead along the right paths.
- (3) That God will always lead along the best paths.

2. Example:

- (1) Exodus 13:17-18.
- (2) The Israelites would have chosen the shortest way to The Promised Land.
- (3) "But God . . ."

3. Requirements for the journey:

- (1) Faith.
- (2) Fortitude.
- (3) Trust.
- (4) Obedience.
- (5) Confidence.
- (6) Courage.
- (7) Deferred judgment.

4. The best time for judgment:

- (1) When the journey is finished.
- (2) When the dark valley is past.
- (3) When the veil is lifted.
- (4) When the tapestry is finally turned.
- (5) When God's pattern and purpose are clear.

5. Another comfort and assurance:
 - (1) Psalm 103:14.
 - (2) "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust."
 - (3) Or: "He knows what we are made of, he remembers that we came from dust."
6. Once more: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."
7. Finally: When we stand at the summit of eternity and recall the path by which God led us home, we shall triumphantly proclaim: "This was the right path! This was the best path!"

IV. An Understanding Of God's Primary Purpose

1. God's primary purpose:
 - (1) From the creation to the rapture;
 - (2) From Eden to eternity;
 - (3) From Adam to Armageddon;
 - (4) From Genesis to Revelation;
 - (5) To put Christ where he rightfully belongs!
2. This was God's primary purpose with:
 - (1) The patriarchs;
 - (2) The lawgivers;
 - (3) The judges;
 - (4) The historians;
 - (5) The poets;
 - (6) The prophets;
 - (7) The priests;
 - (8) The apostles;
 - (9) The heralds;

- (10) The evangelists;
 - (11) The missionaries;
 - (12) The martyrs;
 - (13) The tabernacle, temples, cathedrals and churches;
 - (14) All modern servants;
 - (15) To finally put Christ where he rightfully belongs!
3. This was also God's primary purpose in the twenty third psalm: To put Christ where he rightfully belongs!
4. "For his name's sake:"
- (1) This little phrase is found 32 times in the Bible; seven times in Psalms, and 25 times in other biblical books.
 - (2) The original word embraces:
 - (a) "Lofty."
 - (b) "Where the celestial bodies rotate."
 - (c) "Honor, authority, character, renown."
 - (3) "To derive pleasure from."
 - (3) The interpretation:
 - (a) It is an expression of the human desire to magnify, honor and enhance the name of God.
 - (b) Such mighty names as: "Yahweh, Jehovah, Jehovah-jireh, Jehovah-nissi, Jehovah-shalom, the Lord, the Lord God of Israel, the Lord God of hosts."
 - (c) In the Bible, the combined total of the various names of God exceeds 14,000.
 - (4) The application:
 - (a) Many feel that there is a justifiable spiritual application between this little phrase and Jesus, who is God's namesake.

- (b) Such an application would harmonize with Isaiah 9:6, which says: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."
- (c) It would empathize with Philippians 2:9, which says: "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name."

(5) The indication: If we follow God in the paths of righteousness, we will automatically honor and enhance his name.

5. The Great Shepherd of the Sheep:

- (1) Went before the flock.
- (2) Went to the green pastures.
- (3) Went to the still waters.
- (4) Went into dark Gethsemane.
- (5) Went up to the brow of Mount Calvary.
- (6) Went through the valley of the shadow of death.
- (7) Went into the tomb in which no man had ever been laid.
- (8) Came up from the grave!
- (9) Went up to the mount of ascension.
- (10) Ascended up into the presence of God.
- (11) Now intercedes for us at the right hand of the throne of God.
- (12) Will one day come again to this earth in power and glory.
- (13) Will finally be divinely placed where he rightfully belongs for all eternity!

6. When we understand God's primary purpose:

- (1) We will never again want to run ahead of God.
- (2) Or lag behind.
- (3) Or stray away from the flock.
- (4) Or think we can do better for ourselves than God can do for us.

- (5) Or think that anything outside of God's will is worth snatching at.
 - (6) Or nibble ourselves away from God.
 - (7) Or waste precious time before surrendering to the blessedness of following The Good Shepherd.
7. But rather: We will bless the Lord with all that is within us; and we will join with everything that hath breath, and praise the Lord!

Conclusion

Revelation 14:1-5

1. "A Lamb stood on Mount Zion."
2. "With him were one hundred and forty four thousand who had his Father's name written in their foreheads."
3. "And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunder."
4. "And I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps."
5. "And they sang a new song before the throne of God."
6. "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."
7. "And they are without fault before the throne of God."

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