PSALM 23: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

The 23rd Psalm is perhaps the most familiar passage in all of the Old Testament. It is a deeply personal psalm. It was beautifully written by David and it reflects his own experience with God. Most of us have probably memorized this psalm and quoted it frequently. So I would like to open up the lesson by having us as a class read Psalm 23 together. As you read it, reflect meditatively on what it means to you personally.

READ Psalm 23:1-6

It is always a special challenge as a teacher to stand up in front of a class and to teach a familiar passage. I mean, really, what can I tell you about this passage that you don’t already know? So, what I would like to do this morning is to go thru verse by verse, briefly explaining each one, but then giving you an opportunity to give testimony on what the verse means to you personally. And I’ll share from my own heart as well.

READ Psalm 23:1

If you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior then He is your shepherd. You are one of His sheep. I believe Jesus has this psalm in mind when He says in John Chapter 10: “I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep…I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me…My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” The Lord is MY shepherd and He is the GOOD shepherd who laid down His life for me. He knows me personally and I know Him. He loves me and provided a way for me, undeserving me, to have eternal life. What an amazing thought!

Comment on the picture: In this analogy I am a sheep – you see that black sheep…that’s me! Even though I am different from the other sheep, not as beautiful or as talented or as kind or as good or as loving, my shepherd, Jesus, still loves me and He knows me and He provides for all of my needs. He is MY shepherd and I am HIS sheep.

Comments, testimonies about v 1

READ Psalm 23:2

One of the responsibilities of a shepherd is to lead his flock to their pasture. He leads, they trust him and follow him. And where does our good Shepherd lead us? To green pastures and beside still waters. He protects us and leads us to where we can have our physical needs met as well as our spiritual and emotional needs.

Comment on the picture: For me personally the Lord has led me to many wonderful places where I have made friends with a variety of interesting people – many of whom I love dearly. The journey hasn’t always been easy or the pathway a straight line, but where the Lord led, I followed. He was right there with me. Several times in my life I came to a crossroads and I had difficult decisions to make about which way to go. Each time I sought my Shepherd’s desire and He directed my path. “This way” He said and I followed Him. I shudder to think where I would be today if I had pursued my own path based on my own understanding.

Comments, testimonies about v 2

READ Psalm 23:3

Last week we talked a little bit about sin and how our sin adversely impacts our relationship with God. Praise God that He has provided a way of forgiveness and restoration! 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So that’s the bad news. Even as believers we sin. But the good news in 1 John 1:9 is that, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Comment on picture on the right: This little girl has done something that she knows she shouldn’t have done (devious look on her face). She clutches a Bible which tells us of God’s grace and redemption. At some point she comes clean and says “I’m sorry.” Now it would be very easy for us to forgive this sweet, innocent girl wouldn’t it? But what about us? Can God forgive us? What about that person you know who isn’t so sweet or innocent? Can we forgive them? I love that verse in Psalm 78 which we read last week: ”He (the Lord) remembered that they (the rotten children of Israel) were but flesh.” Jesus spoke these words from the cross: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” God knows us, but He is such a gracious God. Psalm 78 says, “Yet He, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity.” He provided a way for their forgiveness. Did they deserve it? No. We don’t either. But He provided it anyway because He is a good God, “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ps 86:15). Praise God that He is that kind of God!

The good shepherd leads us, His sheep in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. The Lord leads us by His Holy Spirit, thru His word, in the right path, to do what is right. He does this as a testimony of His goodness. You see, the condition of the flock reflects on the character of the shepherd. If the sheep become lost, then it is the shepherd who has failed. If the sheep prosper and grow, it is the shepherd who has succeeded. Your life, my life is a testimony to the goodness and the grace of our awesome God.

Comments, testimony about v 3

READ Psalm 23:4

Comment on the picture: This is a picture of my dad. He is at the funeral of his sister whom he loved dearly, a sweet godly Christian woman. He and his sister were very close and here in this picture he is being consoled by another one of his sisters. Death is an awful reality in this life, isn’t it? It causes such sorrow and grief. This verse promises that we will not have to go through those dark, painful experiences alone. The good shepherd promises to be with us, to walk alongside us and to comfort us when we grieve for those we’ve lost to death or as we go through the experience of death ourselves. The truth is that, unless the Lord returns first, death is something each of us will face one day.

Comments, testimonies about v 4

READ Psalm 23:5

God has so richly blessed us, hasn’t He? We have spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places…”). But we also have been lavished with so many material blessings. And let’s not forget the blessing He has provided us with those relationships with family and friends. We are so blessed, so blessed!

Comment on picture: A great banquet table upon which sits all the best food and drink for us to enjoy. And our enemies see it. They may not like it, but they cannot deny the blessings of God upon us. It speaks not so much about us, but about His goodness to us. The anointing my head with oil and my cup running over further speak of the rich blessings God has lavished upon us.

Comments, testimonies about v 5

READ Psalm 23:6

We have God’s goodness and mercy which we can enjoy right now in this life. But as followers of Christ, as believers, we have an even brighter future ahead… to dwell in the house of the Lord, to live with Him, forever.

Comment on picture: This is the perfect setting for sheep. And Jesus has promised that He has prepared the perfect place for us. “In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it weren’t so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also.” (John 14:2-4) Wow! What a promise! The best is yet to come.

Comments, testimonies about v 6

Close by reading Psalm 79:13: “But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.” [in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father, amen]