

## Dronfield BC 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

#### Intro

What has Psalm 23 got to do with Palm Sunday? While there is no evidence that Jesus quoted from this Psalm as he did from for example, Psalm 22, as a Jewish Rabbi, he would have been very familiar with this Psalm too and in all likelihood would have been thinking about it as He approached His valley of the shadow of death. We will be journeying, not with the fickle crowd of Palm Sunday, but with Jesus as He faces the cross.

This Psalm is filled with **beautiful and soothing imagery**:

- Green pastures
- still waters
- Restores my soul

It is a bold psalm that makes **bold declarations**:

- I lack nothing
- I fear no evil
- My cup overflows
- Goodness & mercy follows me all the days of my life

Almost too good to be true. What planet was the writer of this psalm on? They know nothing of

- cost of living crisis?
- the political drama in our mature democracy that
- relationship challenges
- falling into sin
- betrayal from a friend or someone you've tried to help
- workplace difficulties with colleagues or even your boss
- displacement - having to flee from your country and move to an unfamiliar place where you hope to be welcome.
- separation from your loved ones through incidents that are no fault of yours

They obviously had a good well cushioned life **OR DID THEY**

Psalm 23 is a psalm of David – the heading is NOT written in by the publisher, each Psalm's heading is part of scripture. Why was David able to speak so authoritatively in this Psalm:

#### 1. His life Experience

- living from hand to mouth. Couldn't farm, running from place to place reliant on others good will to survive (see below).
- falling into sin – public adultery and taking advantage of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11& 12) and experiencing God's discipline and forgiveness.
- political drama – Saul the king NOT carrying out the Lord's command to sparing the best of the sheep and cattle blaming others – the soldiers - for it when challenged by Samuel (1 Sam 15) where have I heard that before?

- relationship challenge **and betrayal of a loved one** David's son Absalom staged a coup against his own father attempting to seize the throne (2 Sam 15-18)
- **workplace difficulties with colleagues or the boss.** David served Saul in helping alleviate his poor mental health (1 Sam 16) and in delivering Israel from the Philistines by killing Goliath (1 Sam 17) but Saul in his jealousy and rage hounded David seeking to kill him (1 Sam 19ff)
- **displacement** - having to flee from Israel with King Saul after his life. He lived in the cave of Adullam 1 Sam 22 and even went to live with the Philistines, Israel's sworn enemies 1 Sam 27. Safer place for him to be than in his own country.
- **separation** from his family until they joined him in 1 Sam 22:1-4 and even that was temporary.

Yet through all this he declared: "The Lord is my shepherd"

Do you see that experiencing the Lord as our shepherd is NOT a lack of challenges but of experiencing His being with us IN the situation and bringing us through.

## 2. Expert Witness

Cases turn on the testimony of an expert witness. David's first vocation had been as a shepherd, so he could speak authoritatively about shepherding.

Authenticity of this Psalm is because it was written by a Shepherd.

Another expert witness is W Phillip Keller who wrote a book A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 (2007). Highly recommend it.

**TOTALLY DEPENDS ON WHO THE SHEPHERD IS**

There are different types of Shepherds. The flock of sheep next to Keller's field were owned by an uncaring shepherd and the scrawny and diseased sheep would come to the fence and look longingly at his field. The grass was truly greener on the other side. In 1 Sam 17.34, David saved the sheep under his care from a bear and lion. Jesus in John 10:11& 14 says He is the Good Shepherd – God Himself chose this metaphor as a relationship between God and we, His people. See Ez 34.

**Many things we could draw out from this psalm but let's look at these three:**

**"I shall not want"** means, "All my needs are supplied by the LORD, my shepherd." or "I decide to not desire more than what the LORD, my shepherd gives.

**CONTENTMENT.**

**Anoints my head with oil** – flies and other insects (bugs) lay their eggs in the soft, mucous lined nasal passages of sheep and when they hatch, can drive them to distraction to the point of banging their heads against a tree. A good shepherd regularly anoints the sheep's head to prevent this.

What's bugging you? Tell your shepherd.

**Rod and staff comfort me** – if you refuse the staff of the shepherd to discipline and draw you close when you wonder, you might become like Baarack the Australian sheep who was found with fleece that weighed 35kg 78. He had wondered off and therefore hadn't been shorn for years. He was underweight under all that wool as he could hardly stand to look for food and could hardly see. When he was shorn, they found he had been ear tagged and so must have belonged to a flock.

If the Lord is all this to us, we **MUST** like David, testify.

### 3. TESTIFY

If David had not testified of his Shepherd, we wouldn't be reading this centuries later and be drawing comfort and encouragement from it.

There is no testimony without a test. Testimony of the day Ade suffered a stroke and how the paramedics testified of the peace that I carried. God had been speaking to me through the song "No Longer Slave" to fear which I had played and sung again and again just prior to that.

We now live in an age of relativity. Truth is deemed to no longer be absolute.

However, society acknowledges everyone's lived experience, everyone's story. Just be a witness. We may not be a Billy Graham, but we can tell what Jesus has done for us.

Ps 145: 3-5 One generation will declare your wonderful works to another, they will tell of your mighty acts - not just in church but in our families: to the younger generations.

Questions:

1. Who is your shepherd? Who are you recognising as your shepherd? Who are you allowing to be your shepherd?
2. The image you have of the Lord (Yahweh) is determines your expectations of the shepherd. Loving caring Great shepherd vs Mean shepherd. What image do you carry of God as your Shepherd?
3. What testimony/testimonies can you share of what the Lord has done in your life? Who could you share it/them with?