A Song to Sing

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Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

1. The Power of Music

About two years ago, Christine and I had the opportunity to go to Europe. One evening we went to a music hall to listen to the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. We had to pay for the concert and I was concerned because it was pretty expensive. I hoped that the concert would be good. In the end, we enjoyed the music very much and were very happy. That night I experienced the power of music. I understood why some people pay a lot to listen to live music. Music touches our hearts. From babies to older adults, everyone has a natural fondness for some type of music. The other day when I was in a dentist office, I noticed that the music made the dentists and patients happy. The Bible is filled with references to music. And many people cite the scripture passages when they compose music.

2. Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is probably one of the most recognizable passages in the Bible. This psalm tells us who God is and who we are. If we were to measure the impact of Psalm 23 on human beings, it would be one of the top verses. Why is Psalm 23 referenced so often? It is because this Psalm has the amazing power to touch the hearts of many people. When we hear this Psalm at funerals, those who are grieving are comforted. People who are sick are encouraged by its words. Those who are lonely or depressed receive hope from the passage. The Psalm portrays God as a Good Shepherd who cares for and looks after His flock. So it is called the Shepherd's Psalm. The author of the Psalm, David, was a shepherd before he became a king. David knew what a shepherd was supposed to do.

What does the shepherd do? A shepherd is the one who leads sheep to green pastures to feed them and makes them lie down. The shepherd is

the one who brings the sheep beside safe waters to let them drink. The shepherd brings the sheep to safe places so that they can be refreshed after being in the sun and is the navigator who finds a way among the different routes to keep the sheep safe. The shepherd is a bodyguard who protects the sheep. And when David reflected on his life journey, he recognized that God was his shepherd, guiding him wherever he was. David praised the Lord and sang his praises over and over again.

David is not the only person who calls God a shepherd. The first person who called God shepherd in the Bible is Jacob. In Genesis 48:15 when Jacob blesses Joseph his son in Egypt, he says, "***The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day.***" While Jacob was hiding from his brother Esau, the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "***I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you***" (Gen. 28:15). The Lord had kept His promise taking care of Jacob throughout his life.

The Israelites experienced God as their shepherd as recounted in Isaiah 40:11: "***He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep***." Isaiah prophesies what is going to happen to the Israelites in Babylon. Isaiah tells the Israelites that God is like a shepherd who takes care of his sheep.

In Ezekiel 34:23, the people of Israel hear the good news of God's promise for the future generation: "***I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd***." In contrast to the present evil shepherds (or leaders) of God's people (34:1-6), God would send a Good Shepherd, the Messiah, who would take care of every need of His people. John's gospel tells us that Jesus came as the good shepherd: "***I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep***" (John 10:11). God's promise in Ezekiel of sending a shepherd would be fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

3. Psalm 22

When we read Psalm 23, David seems to have a strong confidence in the Lord. But when we read the Psalm 22 which is also written by David, we notice that David did not always have such a confidence in the Lord. David says, "***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by***

day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest" (Psalm 22:1-2). In this context, David speaks about his own anxiety and sense of helplessness. And yet we see soon after in Psalms 23 that David gains a confidence in the Lord. Did David's situation change so quickly? Probably not. But we see that even in a situation of deep suffering, God reminds us that He is a Good Shepherd and that He can help us to overcome any situation.

4. I Shall Not Want

If we read the Psalm 23 carefully, we notice that David still has some issues. In verse 1, David uses the term, "***I shall not want***." What does David mean by this? I believe that David is talking about both his present situation and his future hope. David understands his current needs may not be met. But he acknowledges that God is still the shepherd in his situation and that God would lead David to a place where he would be able to rest.

I'm sure many of us have been in similar situations. We know God is our shepherd but there are times when we may feel like we may be lacking or may need something more. Even in church, we can often see a need for more resources or volunteers, more program or ideas. And yet, just as David, we are called to trust that the Lord is our Shepherd and follow His leading in our lives and the lives of our community as a community of faith.

Why can't we say, "I do not want" instead of saying "I shall not want."? It might be because we may not know or believe God's mighty power. I have been taking photos for over 40 years. But I always used my camera in automatic mode. When I set my camera in automatic mode, I do not have to worry about the ISO, aperture, and shutter speed settings. When I take pictures in automatic mode, sometimes the image quality is good. But sometimes it is not good at all. Last week for the first time I began to take pictures in manual mode. I was satisfied with the image quality more than before. I began to understand that my camera has so many functions that I can use for better image quality. Even though it takes time for me to set up the camera, the image quality in manual mode is much better than automatic mode. I believe that it is the same case with the Lord. When we know better who our Lord is, we can trust Him more. When we trust Him more, we can praise the Lord in the worst situation.

5. A Song During the Korean War

During the Korean War in the 1950s, South Korea was at one time occupied by the North Korean Army. Many travelled to Busan from the capital of Seoul to escape the invasion. South Koreans were depressed and

hopeless. At that time, a South Korean musician Na Woon Young composed a hymn, “The Lord is My Shepherd” and people began to sing the song. As they sang, people were able to trust that the Lord would protect South Korea from the communists. This hymn gave hope to South Korean people. I’d like to share a clip of this song this morning.

6. Conclusion

How much do we know about who the Lord is? Psalm 23 tells us that God is the one who leads, guides, feeds, protects, provides, and walks with us always.

Today we celebrate the life of Jeff Shultz. His favorite Bible passage is Psalm 23. Jeff loves to sing and plays the guitar every Sunday morning in our worship service. He said he began to play the guitar and join the choir when Errol Leslie was the pastor of our church. Since then, he keeps reminding us on Sundays that we should praise the Lord always regardless of our situations. We are so grateful for his leadership and for giving us the opportunity to reflect on God’s goodness as our Shepherd this morning.

7. Application

Do you have a song to sing that encourages you and reminds you that God is always there as the Good Shepherd? Although all of David’s needs were not met yet, David enjoyed singing Psalm 23. We give thanks to the Lord that He has given us a song to sing in our hearts. And we praise Him that our Good Shepherd Christ Jesus came to this world and continues to be our Good Shepherd as the Savior of this world. Amen.