

Psalm 23

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Could we read together the...

I think justifiably, as you say, a well-known Scripture. I must say, I'm a bit more reluctant these days to speak of any Scripture that isn't well-known, but this one I think we can say is well-known, and that is Psalm 23.

Let's read together the 23rd Psalm.

A Psalm of David.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He leadeth me to lie down in green pasture.

He leadeth me beside the still water.

He restores my soul.

[00:01:04] He leadeth me in the power of righteousness toward his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of sin, I will fear no evil.

For thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, eternal.

Thou searest a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

Thou knowest my head will always be.

My cup runs open.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me through all the ages of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord.

I've been reading this passage for a good many years now, [00:02:04] as to the teaching of the 10th chapter of John.

You will know that in the chapters preceding chapter 10, we're introduced into some of the richest passages in the scripture.

In chapters 11 and 12, there is a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Son of David, and the Son of Man.

The dignity of this person going into death, and having glorified the Father, having finished the work that was given him to do, really diverges into the very depth that we find, it would seem, [00:03:07] in the whole of the scripture. In chapter 13, our feet are washed.

In chapter 14, our hearts are comforted.

In chapter 15, our mouths are open in testimony. In chapter 16, in the face of the opposition of the world, our minds are instructed.

And in chapter 17, he earns a place in the faith-keeping of the Father.

Now all this is wonderful, but I believe that it is, on our side, imperative that we learn the Lord in a shepherd character, in a practical way, if we're going to get the gain of the ministry that's now available to us. So I felt that if we could get some help in regard to the shepherd character, [00:04:03] something of a confidence that the silent reachers in sound ministry will be our confidence as well. Clearly, it's not a confidence that's dependent upon us, but a confidence that's dependent upon him. It's not we who are important, it's because we have such a wonderful shepherd.

So I thought this afternoon we might look at Psalm 23, and I'm going to only pick out three points, and illustrate them. The first one is, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Now is there someone in the New Testament who illustrates this single verse in Psalm 23?

And I'm going to make all the suggestions that there is. Now I know that someone else has made the suggestions, [00:05:01] so that's at least two, and I hope that by the time I've finished, we'll all be saying, well this is quite an excellent illustration, and perhaps you'll speak truth in it, that I don't mention in this little talk again. But I think there is. And that one is Mary Magdalene.

Now you will remember concerning this, that the testimony is, that out of her the Lord cast heaven and earth.

You will remember how the Lord said, in Luke's Gospel, that to whom much is forgiven, the same ought to love as much. Mary Magdalene obviously had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, and her indebtedness is manifest in her pathway, because we learn that it had an effect upon her.

She followed him with others out of Galilee, [00:06:05] and ministered to him of such things.

Now her devotion was such, that she played quite a prominent part, both in the scenes of his death, standing by that center cross, at the sepulcher, and also in the quite wonderful 20th chapter of John, to which I will just draw your attention. You will remember on this notable resurrection morning, the other members of the party had departed.

The witness had seen that the Lord was risen, but when this message reached to Peter and John,

they went to the sepulcher, they saw, as Scripture says, they believed, but they went to their own home.

[00:07:02] And then would come that wonderful communication, but Mary stood without the sepulcher, wounded.

Now I would just like to pause a moment there. Here was a woman, out of whom the Lord had cast seven men, who had not only spent her substance on the Lord, but evidently had committed her all to him, who was now found in a situation where the womb was absolutely empty to her. I think that that moment should be studied. So far as this woman was concerned, the Lord had dropped out, and so far as Mary is concerned, everything had departed, dropped out for her. And she found herself in an interesting position, where she thought everything was gone. Now I think she's saying [00:08:03] that until we're brought to that position, we won't be ready for what follows subsequently in that story. Here was a woman to whom even an angelic communication was not enough.

Good to be interested in angels. I've just learned that there are 300 references to angels in the Scriptures, but here was one who didn't find that even an angel was enough to satisfy her. This angel came along, do you remember, and said, woman, why was that? She turned her back on the angel. That wasn't enough for her. But the Lord had his eye on her, and he put the same question, woman, why was that? Whom figures there are?

You see, here was one who understood her heart completely, and he was the one who was able to meet her in this desperate situation. [00:09:03] We have this afternoon, my sheep hear my voice.

And again, because of his sheep, my name. And you remember on this noteworthy occasion, there was only one word spoken, but that word set in motion a movement in the heart of Mary that, what shall I say, put a fleeting complexion on the whole situation, because the shepherd uttered her voice. Mary. It's a very interesting fact, you know, that the voice of the Lord Jesus seems to be the one thing that doesn't change even with his resurrection body. He had a new body. His voice was just the same. And when that voice was the same, the shepherd knew the voice of the shepherd, [00:10:01] that the sheep knew the voice of the Savior, the shepherd, and she knew at once who it was, rather than I. Now, it's in this kind of situation that you receive what I suppose is the most wonderful communication that's ever fallen on human beings.

The Savior said to her, touch me not.

In other words, we're not going to resume relations now on the old Jewish level. Touch me not, but go tell my brethren, ah, that's a title in connection with resurrection, I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.

Well, a great deal could be said about this, of course. But I think we ought to just see in this the true content of Christianity.

[00:11:04] There is this personal affinity and association between the Lord and his heir. He speaks of them as my brethren.

He speaks elsewhere of my sheep. He speaks elsewhere of my disciples.

He speaks elsewhere.

One more.

I can't just remember it. Someone else remember it. But here, he speaks of my brethren. And in this little circle, which he's pleased to call his own, he was made known to them that the relationships which were his are now to be their enjoyed relationships also. My Father and your Father, my God and your God.

Eternal life, we learned this afternoon, was the knowledge of eternal life, the enjoyment of eternal life, [00:12:02] but the response to eternal life, relationships belonging to eternity, now made available to us in wonderful grace through death, through the gift of the Spirit. And now we find that this little company is bound in a happy position that they have a portion elsewhere.

Now I'm able to say that Mary Magdalene is one who can say, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not walk.

I heard just recently a little girl who was trying to quote this verse, but I'm afraid in her simplicity she stumbled a bit, and she quoted it this way, she said, the Lord is my shepherd and that's all I want. Well, I think it's quite miserable, because if we know the Lord is shepherd, and if we know these relationships belong to eternity in a practical way, then in very truth we can say [00:13:02] the Lord is my shepherd, and that's all I want.

Now let's take a good chance that I'd like to underline in this the life of Islam still.

He restores my soul.

Well, I'm afraid we all have to admit that at the time we met this particular passage in Islam as well. He restores my soul.

True it is we've been brought to green pastures, true it is there are waters of quietness, true it is we've been blessed with all the spiritual blessings, true it is that there is now eternal life in our invoked portion, but He restores my soul.

Now, is there someone in the New Testament who might illustrate this? Well, now, you think about it for a while, and I'll make a suggestion, [00:14:01] and I think that you will agree that this suggestion might fit. Do you think it might be Peter? He restored my soul.

Peter, chief of the apostles. You will remember that this same Peter said to say, this Peter who boasted so much of his love for the Lord, this Peter said to say he was bound in a situation where he denied the Lord with oats and cashews.

What is the secret of this failure?

Could you give a quick answer to that?

Well, if you trace his palm print, perhaps you can see the steps. You remember that there was a time when those disciples were having an argument amongst themselves to be chief amongst themselves.

And it started then, [00:15:02] the Lord was speaking of his death, the disciples, who was going to be chief amongst them. Mayday.

Then we agree that Peter was firing a fire off. Yes, that's another picture. And he was warning himself of the world's fire. Another sad picture.

I heard it put recently, the other day, quite nicely, I think, like this. If you follow those closing scenes, when the Lord was praying, Peter was sleeping.

When the Lord was sleeping, Peter was fighting. And when the Lord was witnessing his good confession, Peter was denying the Lord with oaths and cashews.

Couldn't he?

[00:16:01] But then he found the advocate, the one who could say that I have prayed for me.

The Lord Jesus, in all the majesty and dignity of his person, even in the circumstances of his trial, he turned and he looked on Peter. And you remember it brought quite a revolution in Peter.

He remembered the Lord's words. And he went out and wept bitterly.

I just wonder, you know, whether sometimes we forget the clear scriptural testimonies that kind of stuff were made up, what we're capable of. The difference between Peter and John was [00:17:01] simply this, that whereas Peter was putting all his confidence in his love for the Saviour, so far as John was concerned, his confidence was in the Saviour's love for him.

Five times you find Peter and John say, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Now I think we can all put ourselves into that purposely left open, I think. It doesn't say who the disciple was whom Jesus loved. It's a sort of blank space. We can all stand into that and say, I'm the disciple whom Jesus loved. And if we have the confidence that Peter had, we'll certainly fail. But if we have the confidence that John had, we'll never fail, because his love will never fail. And that's why you find Peter [00:18:02] in closing days, he's found following. Peter turns to have a look and he sees the other disciple following.

That disciple is following today. And if we have the sense of the Lord's love, he goes out.

And he didn't speak. Now the shepherd has the ability to restore him. In due season, three days have elapsed. Death and resurrection have come in.

He has a personal interview with Peter.

Nobody tells us. Scripture's silent. We don't know. The Lord has his private interviews with us sometimes.

Then there was a public interview, wasn't there? The last chapter of John, John chapter 21. [00:19:01] Lovest thou me? Remember how that the leper was brought into the camp. He was given his place in the camp.

The one who denied the Lord and said feed my sheep, feed my lambs, feed my sheep. He was a

commissioner. He was restored. And I say the shepherd made a very good job of that.

Because we believe and let now up converted, strengthen the brethren. Peter's epistles are strengthening epistles. The one who had failed ourselves. Why? He's been under the touch of Shepherd Kier himself. And so in Shepherd Kier he's able to make you and me in all the many vicissitudes of the pathway. [00:20:02] It's sad to say we sometimes let the Lord down. He restored us all. So that the world can satisfy the empty heart and the Lord can bind up the broken heart. Now we come to a situation at the end where he brings us into his presence without knowing this my favourite order my count, who can this be? Who are those who walk in the valley of the shadow of death? Who are those who find themselves in this situation?

Is there anyone in the New Testament who might illustrate this? Just before you give me your answer I'll make a suggestion. Do you think this might possibly be [00:21:01] the two who walked on the immense road? Remember how they said we thought it had been he that would have restored him.

A prophet mighty and worthy.

But death had come in. Death for him. And there they were in the depths of depression. They had turned their backs on Jerusalem and they were going home. Now can the shepherd lead a case like this? Sad house.

Can he laugh at them? The way in which he did it was very interesting. He walked with them. And the time being pointed out I think quite a foolish comment.

He walked in the wrong direction with them. He drew near.

Their eyes were on him. But he walked with them and in the wrong direction. [00:22:01] And after he drove them back a little bit you remember still Paul was his count. What things concerning Jesus of Nazareth?

He first of all got their eyes turned to the Lord and then he gave them the most marvelous scriptural exposition that's ever been heard out of Moses and all the prophets of things concerning himself.

He gave them a touch on the way.

He gave them a touch in the house.

And he would make known to them that the breaking of bread did not our heart burn in us as he spoke with us by the way.

Disappeared out of their sight. The moment that the work was completed the just shall live by the faith. He left them and didn't take any further [00:23:01] move. You know the story better than I do. Up they went those eight miles back to Jerusalem uphill.

I've done that journey by the way but I took the benefit of a bus.

Eight miles uphill is rather hard work but these were men you see who were renewed in vision and they had energy in their heart. Nothing put energy into your veins like a renewed vision of the Lord

and couldn't get back to the Christian country quick enough.

The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared unto Peter and then you come to that marvelous meeting together of all these elements. There they were in the upper room. They were having this converse one with another the Lord is risen and just as a confirmation the Lord stood in the middle and all that they'd been saying was given practical [00:24:01] tangible evidence peace he said peace wonderful communication and I think it must have been perhaps a little exhibition of the fact that the Lord was preparing a table for his own in the midst of this society in the midst of their illness anointing their heads with oil and their cups and ran over I think you know they'd be quiet and sober we have to admit that the times we have together sometimes there are a little bit of heaven on the way at those moments when we get our eyes open to see him through this shepherd character in the way and have the opening up to our hearts of this wonderful world which is ours to embrace.

What a true something of the apostolic portion of fellowship with the Father and the Son the combined benefits of John and Peter [00:25:01] and Paul the liberty of this trip what we know in our simple gatherings gather to his name there are times of heaven upon earth and there are nothing like what we can have when we are in heaven the end of this psalm is the climax of course surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord what is the house of the Lord going to be? for the Christian it's the Father's house there's going to be a private presentation when the Lord presents us to himself that will actually see the judgment seat and the marriage supper and the lap then the public joys of heaven is going to come out there will be the public reign of the Lord Jesus for a thousand years every nature bound [00:26:01] things in heaven things on earth things on the earth marvelous time of ministration and then we'll pass on to the eternal but the joys of the joys of being with him these are available to us now just one little touch I've enjoyed in this passage in John 10 written hand place of security in John in Luke 15 we're on his shoulder place of security in John 13 we're in his womb and through the womb of his mouth in Luke chapter 10 we're found at his feet listening to his word Christianity you can see in this passage Christianity you can see increasingly is the soul's relationship with him and if we're found near us [00:27:01] then we've got all the joys of that calendar that will be in his presence forever the Lord brought us through this morning to be comforted