

THE SONG OF THE SHEPHERD

PSALM 23

Introduction:

Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie gave me a new perspective on this Psalm of the Shepherd some years ago. He used the Psalm when he was counseling someone who was struggling to trust God with some situation in their lives. He suggested that they read the Psalm once a day for seven days, and that each day they use one of the affirmations of the Psalm for themselves. He gave it to them like a doctor would give a prescription to a patient.

You might find such an exercise helpful for your life. Let me give you the seven affirmations that Dr. Ogilvie gave his parishioners. They will warm the heart as you repeat them.

I. THE LORD WILL WORK FOR ME.

"A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." (Psalm 23:1, NRSV)

Whatever else a shepherd does, he works for the good and peace of his sheep. It is this knowledge that the Lord is at work for us that makes it possible to say, "I shall not want."

Indeed you can affirm that if the Lord is working for me that is all that I want.

He is working for me in His providences.

He is working for me in His intercession.

He is working for me constantly as an expression of His grace and goodness.

II. THE LORD WILL PROVIDE FOR ME.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;"

(Psalm 23:2, NRSV)

It is the work of the shepherd to take care of his sheep. He will make sure that they have plenty of food and they have access to good water. Sheep are always in need of green grass and still waters.

The sheep will not lie down until its hunger has been satisfied. Those who study sheep indicate that you cannot force a sheep to lie down if they have a hunger or thirst. What a picture of a sheep whose need has been met!

It is not that the Lord provides for others, though he does, it rather that he makes ME lie down in green pastures, and He leads ME beside the still waters.

What a comfort!

III. HE WILL KEEP ME GOING.

"He restores my soul."

You are familiar with the word "downcast?" Sheep have a problem and give this word its background. When they are heavy with wool and fat, they are

top heaven. If they happen to turn over on their back, they cannot right themselves. They are “downcast”. If the shepherd does to help them back to their feet, they will die. He must restore their soul.

This is what the Lord does for us. When for some reason we are “downcast”, the Lord comes to us and restores us. He is such a faithful Helper in our time of need. How many times we would have despaired if the Lord had not helped us.

IV. THE LORD WILL GUIDE ME.

“He leads me in paths of righteousness for His names sake.”

Sheep have no sense of direction. Unlike other domesticated animals, they would never find the way home without the shepherd. All of us have memories of doing what was right in our eyes only to discover that we had made a tragic blunder. We all need a guide like the sheep need a guiding and wise shepherd.

This affirmation says that the Lord knows where the right paths are and that He will guide us into these paths. He does this so that His name may be glorified in us.

Are you in a quandary about a decision? Why not affirm that He will guide you? Open your heart to His wisdom in a simple prayer of trust.

V. THE LORD WILL PROTECT ME.

"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." (Psalm 23:4, NRSV)

The darkest valley, or the valley of the shadow of death, is a dangerous place to be alone. The protection of the sheep is the shepherd. They are safe as long as he is with them.

Are we not safe because He never leads us where He will not go with us?

His rod is to beat off an enemy, and his staff is used to pull a wayward sheep back into the flock, or back on the path if it has fallen off. O our Shepherd is able to protect.

The reference to the preparation of a table in the presence of the enemy is also encouraging. Whenever you were received into the tent of a desert sheik, you were under his protection. Our Lord has welcomed us into His tent, and covers us with His protection. Affirm it! The Lord will protect me.

VI. THE LORD WILL HEAL ME.

"You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over."

The shepherd was the traveling doctor for the sheep. When a sheep became ill, it was his responsibility to care for it. He carried with him a vessel full of olive oil that would be mixed with some spices. It would be used to anoint the ailing or wounded sheep.

In the Old Testament anointing is associated with divine blessing and provisions. O how our heavenly Shepherd watches over us! We are wounded, He knows and cares. If we are sick, He knows and cares. But He does more, He heals. Actually all healing of body or soul are His work. Apart from Him there is no healing.

He truly makes the cup of life to overflow. What a picture of a full and complete life.

VII. THE LORD WILL PURSUE ME.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever." (Psalm 23:6, NKJV)

What a comfort! The word "follow" includes "pursue." It is the pursuit of the shepherd that makes the sheep safe. He will not allow them to be lost! Goodness and mercy are two basic attributes of our Lord. Goodness is His glory. Mercy is His loyalty to His promises and His covenant. We will make it to the Father's house because He will not let us go.

It is not a matter of you holding out or holding on, but rather it is matter that He will not give up.

So there they are. An affirmation of each day of the week! Read the Psalm every day, but voice one of the affirmations for the day. You will probably

want to continue this exercise once you have tried it. It will surely build in you a confidence in the Lord who is our Shepherd.