

A Devotion on PSALM 23 – GOD is Our Eternal Good Shepherd

I. PSALM 23:1-6 – A PSALM of David

1 The LORD is My Shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing.

2 He shall feed me in a green pasture,
and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

3 He shall convert my soul,

and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me.

5 Thou shalt prepare a table before me
in the presence of them that trouble me;
Thou has anointed my head with oil,
and my cup shall be full.

6 Surely Thy loving-kindness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in The House of The LORD
for ever. AMEN. ¹

¹ 1, Anglican Book of Common Prayer, PSALM 23:1-6, p 95. "Dominus regit me."

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN - GOD IS OUR ETERNAL GOOD SHEPHERD?

Dr. Kenneth Haugk of Stephen Ministries, in “Don’t Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart,” writes of PSALM 23:

“Perhaps no passage of Scripture has been used more often to comfort hurting people than PSALM 23. What comfort do the suffering find here? The incomparable Presence of GOD...

Just as the shepherd is with his sheep, GOD is with his people. His Presence comforts. It means that wherever we are, in whatever situation, we are not alone.

Not alone! What is more discouraging and disorienting than feeling utterly alone? JESUS knew something about loneliness... Those who suffer aloneness experience depths of despair poignantly expressed in JESUS’ heartbreaking cry on The Cross... “My GOD, My GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me?”^{2 3}

Aloneness is never so sharp as when someone is suffering. While GOD’s Presence can be a powerful antidote to loneliness, suffering people may have a difficult time believing GOD is with them. One gift... [we] can offer them is to be present in their pain. The mere physical presence of another human being can bring significant comfort to those who are suffering. The heaviest veil of suffering is a sense of destitute aloneness.

Even more helpful is to have someone with them in mind and spirit – understanding and empathizing with them in their pain. Even terrible pain and suffering can become bearable when people know someone is truly and fully with them. “As... caring servants of Faith, we follow The [Eternal] Good Shepherd’s example when... [we] walk with them in their dark valleys” in The Love of CHRIST.⁴

² 2, KJV, PSALM 22:1, “My GOD, my GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me? why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”

³ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 27:46; MARK 15:34, “And at the ninth hour JESUS cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My GOD, My GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

⁴ 3, Haugk, “Don’t Sing to a Heavy Heart,” p 27-28. “CHRIST Caring for People Through People.”

III. WHEN WAS THE GOOD SHEPHERD WITH YOU IN A DARK VALLEY?

For me, the darkest valley in my life was in the year 2000. I was recovering from major surgery for cancer. My then wife had abandoned me. My daughter was prevented from seeing me. I was cut off from all those whom I loved. I was shrouded in a dark cloud of despair and hopelessness. I cried out in my soul, “My GOD, my GOD, why hast Thou abandoned me?”⁵ Again, These are The same Words that JESUS Himself uttered, in His death agony, on The Cross to His Father.⁶ But without The Cross, there is no Resurrection.

I felt far from The Presence of The Lord. I did not want to go on. In that darkest time, GOD did hear my cry, and sent my Pastor to my bedside in His Name. My Pastor didn’t say much. He didn’t come armed with any Biblical prescriptions. He offered no passing trite words. He neither chastised me nor preached at me. Instead, he sat there with me for some time. He held my hand. He was present with me in my pain. After a time he spoke with me briefly. He offered a prayer. He acknowledged my dark valley and my pain.

And then I realized that GOD was answering my prayer in the presence of my Pastor. He calm and giving presence reminded me that The LORD my Eternal Good Shepherd had not abandoned me. GOD was there with me in His Spirit, in His Providence, in His protecting Loving-kindness and mercy and in this other person. My aloneness was broken by CHRIST’s Love. I could hear, as it were, His Word in my heart, “...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!”⁷

May we, as caring servants of Faith, be a reminder to all those in the dark valley of pain and suffering, that they are not alone. May we offer our humanity in The Likeness of The Lord’s loving-kindness and mercy. And may we be reminders to others that GOD our Eternal Good Shepherd is Present with them, even and especially in the midst of their darkness.

⁵ 2, KJV, PSALM 22:1a.

⁶ 2, See MATTHEW 27:46.

⁷ 2, KJV, HEBREWS 13:5.

IV. LET US PRAY

Let us come before The LORD, each according to their own Way.
The LORD be with you!

And also with you!

Let us pray:

O GOD, merciful... [Eternal One,] we praise Thee in that Thou hast heard us in the hour of distress, and art become our salvation. Thou art a GOD full of compassion, and plenteous in mercy. We are alive to praise [and serve] Thee this day, not for our worthiness, but because of Thy great mercies. When we were in distress, Thou didst help us; when trouble was hard upon us, and our strength failed, Thine almighty arm was our defence. Accept our thanksgiving, and keep us ever mindful of Thy...” loving-kindness, for the sake of those to whom Thou dost send us as Thy servants. O Thou our Eternal Good Shepherd! AMEN.⁸

Let us go forth to love and serve The LORD!
Thanks be to GOD!

⁸ 1, Anglican Book of Common Prayer,” p A-58. Prayer “For Deliverance from Peril.”

V. REFERENCES

1. "The Revised Offices of The Book of Common Prayer." The 48th General Council of The Reformed Episcopal Church. The Special Commission on Prayer Book Revision of The Reformed Episcopal Church. 1997. 2nd Edition.
2. "King James Version" Bible. Bible Works 7. Bible Works, LLC. Norfolk, Virginia. 2006.
3. "Don't sing Songs to a Heavy Heart – How to Relate to Those Who are Suffering." Kenneth C. Haug, PhD. Stephen Ministries, Saint Louis, Missouri. 2004.