

a sermon from PSALM 23:1-6:

IF THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, WE SHALL NOT WANT

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I. A PROPOSITION

If The LORD is our Shepherd, then 1) we shall be refreshed; 2) our hearts shall rest in peace; 3) we shall never be alone; 4) our souls shall be comforted!

II. A SCRIPTURE - PSALM 23:1-6

¹ The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me 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 they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in The House of The LORD for ever. ¹

III. INTRODUCTION

What does This Scripture of David mean in PSALM 23:1, “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want?”² It means that, whatever our station in life as GOD’s people, there are always days when we become weary and despairing, turning away from our sure hope in The Lord, hiding from the light of His face. King David of old experienced this, for though he was a man of great Faith, even he had times when his hope in GOD was shaken and he cried out in distress to The Most High.

It also means that, because of GOD’s unshakable and steadfast goodness and mercy, as Saint Paul says in ROMANS 8:28, “...all things work together for good to them that love GOD...”³ So this is a PSALM of Faith in which David renews his sure hope in The LORD. That if we are indeed His sheep, and He is indeed our Eternal Good Shepherd, He will bring all things in our lives to good for His purposes for us. Therefore, we shall want for nothing, either earthly or eternal, within His will for us.

For though despair tempts us to wander far from the safety of His pastures, GOD Himself ever calls us back in hope to His side. Our Eternal Good Shepherd leads us back from despair into the good pastures of hope in His Name. Intertwining Marty Haugen’s hymn “Shepherd Me, O GOD” and PSALM 23, from which that hymn is derived, we may discern that, if The LORD is our Shepherd, then: 1) we shall be refreshed; 2) our hearts shall rest in peace; 3) we shall never be alone; 4) our souls shall be comforted. So we shall see.

¹ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:1-6.

² 1, KJV, PSALM 23:1.

³ 1, KJV, ROMANS 8:28.

IV. IF THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, WE SHALL BE REFRESHED

First, if The LORD is our Shepherd, we shall be refreshed. David writes in PSALM 23:1-3a, “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul...”⁴ Sheep need tender grass to feed on and quiet pools of clean water to drink from. If The LORD is our Shepherd, He leads us to the places of refreshment we require to carry on in His Name. Stanza 1 of the hymn, “Shepherd Me, O GOD” reads:

“GOD is my Shepherd, so nothing shall I want,
I rest in the meadows of [His] faithfulness and love,
I walk by the quiet waters of [His] peace!”⁵

Where else should GOD’s servants go to be refreshed from their weariness, but to The Master and His House? So David shows us the love of GOD towards us “...portrayed under the figure of a shepherd for the flock.”⁶ Our very being is refreshed and restored when we bend our knee and allow The Eternal Good Shepherd to lead us into His healthful pastures, there to graze upon His Presence, His Word and His Sacraments. And there alone may we drink from The Living Waters of His Spirit, quenching the thirst within us to be sheltered and renewed under His wings!

What does our Eternal Good Shepherd say to us His sheep in EZEKIEL 34:15-16? “I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith The Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick...”⁷ As Saint Augustine says, if “our Lord JESUS CHRIST is my Shepherd, I shall lack nothing!” For “He hath led me to The Faith, setting me for my sustenance in a place of springing herbage,” to His holy Word, to His Most Blessed Sacrament of The Eucharist, to His very Presence, to fellowship with others, all within His faithful Church!⁸

And JESUS CHRIST Himself, our Eternal Good Shepherd Incarnate, declares in JOHN 10:14-15 that He lays down His own life on The Cross for us to redeem us from suffering, pain and death. “I am The Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As The Father knoweth Me, even so know I The Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep.”⁹ Therefore Saint Augustine says further, The Saviour Himself “...has brought me up on the water of Baptism, which restores health and strength to those who have lost them” in His holy Church.¹⁰

⁴ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:1-3a.

⁵ 3, Sunday Missal and Hymnbook 2008, “PSALM 23: Shepherd Me, O GOD.” Music: Marty Haugen, Text: PSALM 23, Marty Haugen. Page 624, Stanza 1,

⁶ 4, NAB, PSALM 23, comment on verses 1-4, p 520.

⁷ 1, KJV, EZEKIEL write in 34:15-16.

⁸ 5, Augustine, “St. Augustine on The PSALMS, Volume 1,” PSALM 22, V. 2, p 229.

⁹ 1, KJV, JOHN 10:14-15.

¹⁰ 5, Augustine, “St. Augustine on The PSALMS, Volume 1,” PSALM 22, V. 2, p 229.

V. IF THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, OUR HEARTS SHALL REST IN PEACE

Second, if The LORD is our Shepherd, our hearts shall rest in peace. David says in PSALM 23:3b-4 of GOD's restful places for the burdened heart, "...He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. 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 they comfort me."¹¹ For the sake of His holy Name, Which is perfect Mercy and Grace, The Almighty shepherds us to His place of rest and peace. Stanza 2 of the hymn, "Shepherd Me, O GOD" reads:

"Though I should wander the valley of death,
I fear no evil, for You are at my side,
Your rod and Your staff, my comfort and my hope!"¹²

As Haugk observes, our Eternal Good Shepherd is always with us to guide and protect us. "...As the shepherd and his sheep together entered the valley of the shadow of death, the shepherd carried a rod and staff to protect his sheep and himself from harm. 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!"¹³ As Saint Augustine says of such Divine Grace, along the "...paths of His justice" does He lead me, "not for any merits of mine, but for The Glory of His own Name!"¹⁴

When the enemies of GOD's people afflict as ravenous wolves and hungry lions, it is The Eternal Good Shepherd's rod that beats back the attackers, and His staff that pull us back to His side within The Church. Leading us out of the dark valleys of death is The Light of the world, JESUS CHRIST, Who beckons us onto the paths of righteousness, walking with us and – when necessary – carrying us. This is our sure hope in The LORD's Anointed One at The Cross, which drives away all despair, despondency and hopelessness. This, not only on the peaks of blessings, but also in the valleys of trials!

Even in the shadow of the valley of death, let us not sin by refusing the care of our Eternal Good Shepherd, that we might insist on casting aside hope and perishing in the darkness of despair! As The Catechism of The Catholic Church says, the opposite of hope is despair, when "man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from GOD, for help in attaining it, or for the forgiveness of his sins" when The Church has pronounced her forgiveness of them over the soul of the penitent through her ministries of The Sacraments and The Word. "Despair is contrary to GOD's goodness, to His justice – for The Lord is faithful to His promises – and to His mercy."¹⁵

¹¹ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:3b-4.

¹² 3, Sunday Missal and Hymnbook 2008, "PSALM 23: Shepherd Me, O GOD." Music: Marty Haugen, Text: PSALM 23, Marty Haugen. Page 624, Stanza 3,

¹³ 2, Haugk, "Don't Sing to a Heavy Heart," p 27, paragraph 2-3. Commentary on PSALM 23, "CHRIST Caring For People Through People."

¹⁴ 5, Augustine, "St. Augustine on The PSALMS, Volume 1," PSALM 22, V. 3, p 229.

¹⁵ 6, Catechism of The Catholic Church, #2091, p 563. "Hope."

What does our Lord say in the face of the disbelieving and blind Pharisees in JOHN 8:12? He says "...I am The Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." ¹⁶ Walk in The Light of GOD and our paths shall be made straight! For Thou, O Word of GOD made Flesh, are The One of Whom it is written in PSALM 119:105, O Lord, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." ¹⁷

VI. IF THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, WE SHALL NEVER BE ALONE

Third, if The LORD is our Shepherd, we shall never be alone. David declares in PSALM 23:5 that, if The LORD is our Shepherd through the valleys and up to the peaks of life, His hand will always be upon us. We shall never be alone. So he writes, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." ¹⁸ Stanza 3 of the hymn, "Shepherd Me, O GOD" reads:

"Gently You raise me and heal my weary soul,
You lead me by pathways of righteousness and truth,
My spirit shall sing the music of Your Name!" ¹⁹

David next writes of The Almighty's love for us in the imagery of "a host's generosity toward a guest." ²⁰ For see, The King of the universe feeds us in all our needs, and He shall never desert us, even in the very face of those who wish our ruin! We are "...GOD's friend and guest" at His banquet of Grace and Mercy! For by His own hand, He anoints our heads with "perfumed ointment made from [the finest] olive oil" ²¹ From our infancy to our adulthood, CHRIST our Redeemer feeds us and anoints us with His Love.

As Saint Augustine says here, O GOD, "...Thou didst spread a banquet before my eyes, in which the milk of infancy was no longer to sustain me; but as one grown up I was to take solid food to strengthen me in the face of my persecutors..." For "Thou has gladdened my soul with spiritual joy..." O Eternal Good Shepherd, "How sweet is that cup of Thine which drives away all remembrance of the foolish pleasures of the past!" ²²

¹⁶ 1, KJV, JOHN 8:12.

¹⁷ 1 KJV, PSALM 119:105.

¹⁸ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:5.

¹⁹ 3, Sunday Missal and Hymnbook 2008, "PSALM 23: Shepherd Me, O GOD." Music: Marty Haugen, Text: PSALM 23, Marty Haugen. Page 624, Stanza 2,

²⁰ 4, NAB, PSALM 23, comment on verses 1-4, p 520.

²¹ 4, NAB, PSALM 23, comment on verse 5, p 520.

²² 5, Augustine, "St. Augustine on The PSALMS, Volume 1," PSALM 22, V 5., p 229-230.

The Psalmist recalls how the ancient Israelites complained for lack of food and drink in the wilderness before The LORD. They cried out, “Where is This GOD of yours, Moses?” They chided The Friend of GOD in EXODUS 14:11, “...Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?”²³

But the souls of the redeemed, secured by The Blood of The Redeemer at The blessed Cross, rejoice in fellowship with CHRIST and with the brethren, for they are never alone! The Psalmist answers in PSALM 78:19-20, that if GOD is our Provider, we are never forsaken nor destitute! “Yea, they spake against GOD; they said, Can GOD furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, He smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can He give bread also? can He provide flesh for His people?”²⁴

Indeed He can and does, as JESUS answers in JOHN 6:35, “...I AM The Bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst!”²⁵ The Son of GOD, The One Who is The “I AM THAT I AM” comes to shepherd us back to Himself.²⁶ And so the cups of our lives and souls overflow in relationship with Him and all the saints on earth and in Heaven!

VII. IF THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, OUR SOULS SHALL BE COMFORTED

Fourth, if The LORD is our Shepherd, our souls shall be comforted. David concludes in PSALM 23:6, that if The LORD is our Shepherd, His goodness and mercy shall pursue us relentlessly, both now and forever. Our dwelling place in this life, and in the hereafter, rest in His Presence. So he writes, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in The House of The LORD for ever.”²⁷

²⁷ Stanza 4 of the hymn, “Shepherd Me, O GOD” reads:

“Surely Your kindness and mercy
Shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I will dwell in The House of my GOD for evermore!”²⁸

What are the Divine blessings of men keeping covenant with GOD The Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but His covenantal “goodness and love” towards us His sheep?²⁹ David sings of GOD’s covenantal goodness and love in PSALM 40:1-3, “...I waited patiently for The LORD; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and

²³ 1, KJV, EXODUS 14:11.

²⁴ 1, KJV, PSALM 78:19-20.

²⁵ 1, KJV, JOHN 6:35.

²⁶ 1, KJV, EXODUS 3:14.

²⁷ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:6.

²⁸ 3, Sunday Missal and Hymnbook 2008, “PSALM 23: Shepherd Me, O GOD.” Music: Marty Haugen, Text: PSALM 23, Marty Haugen. Page 624, Stanza 4,

²⁹ 4, NAB, PSALM 23, comment on verse 6, page 520.

established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our GOD...”³⁰

As Charles Spurgeon observes, GOD’s goodness and mercy towards us His sheep follows us all the days of our lives, “...the black days as well as the bright days, the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting, the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer.” For His “goodness supplies our needs and [His] mercy blots out our sins!”³¹ The hounds of Heaven, as it were, pursue us without ceasing, by His Grace.

Therefore David rejoices in PSALM 65:4 in the blessedness of GOD’s goodness and love for us, that our souls may be satisfied and rest securely in the courts of The LORD’s House, both now and forever. “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that He may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy House, even of Thy holy Temple!”³²

As Spurgeon says further, “While I am here [on this earth], I will be a child at home with my GOD; the whole world shall be His House to me; and when I ascend into The upper Chamber, I shall not change my company..., I shall only go to dwell in The Upper story of The House of The Lord for ever” in Heaven!³³

What does The risen CHRIST say to His Apostles and to us in JOHN 14:1-3? “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in GOD, believe also in Me. In My Father’s House are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I AM, there ye may be also!”³⁴

VIII. BACK TO HIS FLOCK THE CHURCH

Let us then not despair. As David did at times in his life, so we too at times wander from The Flock of GOD, finding ourselves lost in arid and waterless deserts. As David did at times, we also experience attacks from the wolves of the world, the flesh and the devil. But it is especially in those times, when we wander from His Church and find ourselves lost or under attack, that we most clearly hear the voice of our Eternal Good Shepherd! For resting in the peace of His Fold, we often take His Providence for granted.

Is it not most especially in difficult times, that our Eternal Good Shepherd delivers men and women of Faith, when we call out for His rod and staff to lead us back to His green pastures and still waters within The Church? Indeed, it is then most powerfully, that He rescues by His powerful rod and sure staff! It is especially then, in our darkest valleys of trouble and affliction, that the humble most readily see His light and obey His call!

³⁰ 1, KJV, PSALM 40:1-3.

³¹ 7, Spurgeon, “Treasury of David, Volume 1,” PSALM The Twenty-Third, 6., p 356.

³² 1, KJV, PSALM 65:4.

³³ 7, Spurgeon, “Treasury of David, Volume 1,” PSALM The Twenty-Third, 6., p 356-357.

³⁴ 1, KJV, JOHN 14:1-3.

As Kenneth Haugk observes, it is “The incomparable Presence of GOD” that becomes our only sure hope that causes our souls to be sure that we shall dwell in His House forever!³⁵ That we should bend the knee before His holy and loving Presence. That we should obey His voice and return to His Fold, The Church on earth, to prepare us to enter The Church in Heaven.

That we should be fed in the green pastures of His Word. That we should drink from the refreshing waters of His Sacrament of Baptism. That we should seek to become more and more as our Eternal Good Shepherd Himself in righteousness and holiness through the regular reception of The Sacraments of Reconciliation and The Eucharist. That we should be filled, cleansed and renewed by His Spirit daily. That we would with every breath sing out to Him ,ever louder and louder, at The blessed Cross, “Shepherd me, O GOD, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life!”³⁶

IX. IN CONCLUSION

We began with the question, what do These Words of David of old mean in PSALM 23:1, “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want?”³⁷ It means first, that if The LORD is our Shepherd, we shall always be refreshed. David answers in PSALM 23:2-3a, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.”³⁸

It means second, that if The LORD is our Shepherd, our hearts shall rest in His peace. David answers in PSALM 23:3b-4, “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. 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 they comfort me.”³⁹ It means third, that if The LORD is our Shepherd, we shall never be alone. As David answers in PSALM 23:5, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”⁴⁰

And it means fourth, that if The LORD is our Shepherd, our souls shall always be comforted. As David answers in PSALM 23:6, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in The House of The LORD for ever.”⁴¹ May it ever be so with us His sheep, before The good and merciful Presence of our Eternal Good Shepherd! In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost.
AMEN.

³⁵ 2, Haugk, “Don’t Sing to a Heavy Heart,” p 27, paragraph 1. Commentary on PSALM 23, “CHRIST Caring For People Through People.”

³⁶ 3, Sunday Missal and Hymnbook 2008, “PSALM 23: Shepherd Me, O GOD.” Music: Marty Haugen, Text: PSALM 23, Marty Haugen. Page 624, Refrain.

³⁷ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:1.

³⁸ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:2-3a.

³⁹ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:3b-4.

⁴⁰ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:5.

⁴¹ 1, KJV, PSALM 23:6.

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