

Surely Goodness and Mercy...

Richard "Arvin" Overton would get up early one morning like he had done for the past 109 years of his life, he grabbed his cup of coffee and off he went to his favorite spot in his home, the front porch, to sit in his rocking chair. But for some reason this morning seemed different. The fresh scent of spring was in the air; he could hear the leaves swaying even see the new budding flowers. This scene put him in a state of tranquility, almost as if he could stop time. One thing he learned in his old age was to appreciate life moments. As he rocked in his chair back and forth, he began to reflect on his life. Like the home he built in 1945 and how he never moved because that home was all he needed. Thoughts of his family and how they gathered on that front porch and experience laughter and good times. His time in the war and how metal bullets graced over his head barely escaping death...he mumbled to himself "God took care of me". The love he had for his church and how that church kept him going all these years. Yes, it seemed to be the perfect morning to look back over his life.

In fact, this is where we met King David sitting on his throne; his heart and mind are at peace. Thinking of the goodness of God and the favor he received from the Lord...and as thoughts shuffle through his mind he dares to pick up his pen and write the words, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

Many of us know this psalm, rather you are churched or un-churched you have heard this psalm. In fact, many of us have memorized it, even plastered it on our walls. While it is filled with beautiful poetry and emphatic literature, it's also one the psalms that leaves many of us asking the question... "If the Lord is my shepherd, why am I still wanting?" Lord I asked for that job, for you knew I could not provide for my family. Lord I have asked for you to fix my relationship you know I love that person, still no sign of them. Lord you know I love my family, that's why I asked you

to take away the cancer. God I am confused, if you are my shepherd, why am I still in need?

Today we are going to spend our time in Psalms 23 and we are going to see King David explain to us what it means for the Lord to be our shepherd. First, we see that since the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Second, we see that since the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not fear. Last, we shall see that since the Lord is my shepherd, I shall dwell. I have entitled this message **surely goodness and mercy...**

As you turn to Psalms 23 let me set the scene for you. King David is sitting on his throne, he has obtained peace in his kingdom and he begins to reflect on the grace God has shown him. Even with the dangers of his life, David concluded that God's persistent loves had always protected and guided him. At this point of his life he is beyond the days of boyhood, having already known enemies, already known the feeling of death, he reflects on the rest and refreshment he now enjoys. He picks up his pen of inspiration and dips it in the ink of illumination and writes the 23rd psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want (Ps. 23v1-3)

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want", I can imagine as David wrote this verse his mind went back to the times where the Lord provided for him. Times when he was in need and God's hand of provision was with him. Maybe when he needed courage and strength to defeat Goliath, even the wisdom to out smart King Saul. If there was anybody who knew what it meant to provide for his sheep, if there is anybody who knows what it means to be a shepherd, it was David. David knew first hand that care and affections of a good shepherd toward his flock. Shepherding in the Middle East is an ageless profession; the shepherd knew his sheep, even to the point of naming them, knowing and understanding their behaviors for he was with them so much. Hear me, the Lord was with David so much that he knew him by name, even understood his unpredictable behaviors and for that reason David said, "The Lord is my shepherd".

Often times when the word “shepherd” is used in scripture it paints a picture of a distant deliverer, but David says “MY”, which is the most intimate metaphor we encounter in this psalm. David understood that God was a shepherd to him; therefore he concluded, “I shall not want anything”. V2 “he makes me lie down in green pastures”, David experienced spiritual nourishment, hear me, the word of God is the nourishment of God, never barren, never eaten, never parched but always green. Often times sheep were so tired they had a hard time lying down, so the shepherd had to lovingly force them to the ground to rest. Many of our lives are filled with endless demands screaming for our attention but God says, “Lie down”. “Leads me beside still waters”, David knew that God does not lead his people by troubled waters or rapid tides but by silent streams, that God is leading me to a peaceful place of rest and feeding.

V3 “restores my soul”, if anyone knew the need of restoration, the feeling of being exhausted and weary from life it was David, we see in Psalms 51 v11-12 “restore to me the joy of my salvation”, put me back were I belong. “Lead me in paths of righteousness for your name sake”; God led David to do right things, for a good shepherd knows the right path to bring his sheep home. Be careful Summit not to take credit for the good and right work you do, that’s called spiritual plagiarism. Sadly, many of us take credit for the work we did not do alone, David never forgot to cite his source, God.

By this time many of you would not disagree with what I have said thus far, we love to hear about God providing for us, that God will lead us to do right things, but what if I told you that the benefits in verses 2-3 are all predicated on v1. Everybody wants part 2 but they skip part 1. “The reason many of us are not seeing God meet our needs are because we are not his sheep.” You have to be a sheep to have a shepherd; you must not feel free to claim psalms 23 until you have accepted psalms 22. For in

Psalms 22, the shepherd lays his life down for his sheep, the good shepherd, Christ Jesus. This same Jesus says in **John 10:14-16** “that all my sheep know my voice and I lay my life down for them”. You cannot claim the benefits of God if you have not put your faith in him. You can not claim part 2, that God will make you lie down in green pastures, lead you beside still waters, restore your soul, if you have not accepted part 1. David said, “The Lord is my shepherd”.

Her name was Garbage Mary, true story; she dressed in rags and smelled horrible. Spending her days digging through trashcans and garbage for hours and then collecting that trash and hoarding it. She stayed in a run-down shack filled it with dirt, filth, and tons of garbage. In fact if you or I were to walk in Garbage Mary’s shack we would find mounds and mound of trash, trash on the floors, closets, cabinets and any other place should could find to stuff it. One-day garbage Mary was caught doing what she does best, digging through a mall garbage can. Police arrested her and took her into custody, spending hours trying to find out who she was, running every police scan they could find, eventually giving up and taking her back to her old shack. After spending hours digging through the mounds of trash they ran across something interesting, they found files and files of paper showing that Garbage Mary owned oil stocks in Kansas, even having 8 large financial accounts filled with money’s up to 400,000 dollars each. See garbage Mary was the daughter of a wealthy lawyer in Illinois, come to find out garbage Mary was a millionaire. She had untold wealth at her disposal but sadly she never claimed the wealth she had inherited. The real issue with garbage Mary was not that she collected garbage, but that she did not know whom her father was and sadly could never claim the benefits that were rightfully hers.

So the question on the table is...**is the Lord your shepherd?**

Hear me, you cannot claim the benefits of God, unless you are his sheep. David knew since he was a sheep of God, God would provide all that he needed. But Pastor Ricky while that sounds great, you never answered my question **“why didn’t the Lord provide what I asked for?”** Evidently in his eyes you didn’t need it...David says, **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”**.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not fear (Ps. 23v4-5)

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”. We have left the shady green pastures, left the still waters, we have lived in tranquility but now we experience turbulence. Now we are in the valley. How did we get here? We are in the deepest darkness, even the shadow of death. I wonder what is going through David’s mind? Maybe the haunting feeling of King Saul trying to constantly destroy him or maybe it was the guilt of wrongfully killing a man to sleep with his wife. Hear me, if anyone knows the taste of darkness and death, its David, he said in **1 Samuel 20v3** **“it is only one step between me and death”**.

But something interesting happens here, in V1-3, David says the word “he” but in V4 the “he” becomes a “you”. Until now the psalmist is talking in 3rd person but when he steps foot in the valley he stops talking about God and starts talking to God. See the darker the valley the closer the Lord... **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me”**. Hear me, the valley is real, in fact many of us are in the valley, sickness has ravaged your body, depression has become our life, and at our lowest even the thought of death has seemed better than the thought of life, the valley is real. But David said, **“it is but a walk”**, for those of us in Christ Jesus you shall never be lost in the valley, for **“your rod and your staff comfort me”**. The rod was an essential tool for the shepherd almost an extension of his hand. It provided great assistance with the sheep, able to fight off predators and if a sheep fell, he could reach down and pull it back to safety.

I asked the question earlier “how did we get here?” And the answer is “the Lord”; the same spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness is the same spirit that leads you and I into the valley. Hear me, you and I have got to have a religion tough enough to deal with the “even though” transitions and shifts in life. In April 2016 my wife and I found out that our son has a rare genetic disorder, making him more susceptible to different childhood cancers. **You never know Jesus is enough until he is all you have.** “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”, don’t be overwhelmed by the shadow, for El Shaddai is overshadowing you. Could it be that David knew that in the valley God would offer him the greatest gift? Himself. David knew that even in the valley amidst his enemies, God would still comfort and provide for him. So church, why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come? Why should my heart feel lonely and long for heaven and home. When Jesus is more portion, a constant friend is he, his eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me. “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me”.

Once a year my black pastor friends and I get up to do a reunion, since most of us are spread all over the country. And this year we decided to go to Montana! Now I know many of you are saying, “why in the world would 10 black guys go to Montana?” And my answer to that is “mind your business ha ha ha”. One of my mentors Bryan Loritts, who has taught here a few times, has a friend in Montana who owns an 11,000 acre ranch. So we get off the plane and we are in this valley and it is beautiful, lush green grass, snowcaps all around. The owner is talking to us, he says “everything on the ranch is yours have a great time, but just know that we have mountain lions and bears on the premises”. My black friends and me looked at each other and said “did he say mountain lions” and we took off running to the cabin. Listen, my white brothers and sister, we don’t do wild life, whens the last time you hear Jun bug or Jerome getting eating by a mountain lion! So we take off for the cabin and I burst in the door and then I see it...taxidermy! AHH, so now I got wildlife

outside and inside. Do you know how hard it is to take a nap when a mountain lion is looking at you? We finally made our way outside and I'm standing in awe of the mountains and snowcaps and Bryan walks up to me and says, "Beautiful isn't it?" I say, "Yes", he says "don't stare to long at the snowcaps", "why?" he says "while they are majestic, life can't sustain that high up, but in the valley there's food". And when he says that my eyes drop and I see the lush green grass in the valley.

I'm worried, as I look out at our church it seems as if we are all running for the mountain top life. The American dream...the perfect house, perfect job, perfect school, the perfect comfort yet, all the while running away from hardships, struggles and pain. Hear me, life cannot sustain that high up, don't despise the valley for in the valley there is food for your soul. Many of you are in the valley and you want to run through it, get it over with but hear me, God is with you in it, God is closer to you in the valley than he is on the mountaintop. For he would say in **Ps. 34:18** "I am near to the brokenhearted and save the crushed spirit". So the question is **"why are we running from the valley?"** David says, **"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me"**.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall dwell (Ps. 23v6)

As King David sits on his throne, meditating on God his shepherd, he was reminded of his saviors love for him. How God was not only with him on the mountaintop but even with him in the valley. David said in **Ps. 139:8** "no matter where I go you are with me" and he comes to this stark conclusion that the Lord's loyal love shall go with him wherever he may go. No matter the circumstance, throughout his life the Lord would never leave him. He says, **"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me"**, this word "mercy" is a covenantal word, meaning steadfast love, meaning "Hesed". And coupled together with goodness it suggests the steady kindness and support of God, in which you and I can count on. This idea was so good to David that he said "surely" which simply means, "YES!" As the Lord promised to be with David, David

had promised himself the Lord. Yes! Goodness and Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

When David say's "follow" many of us think this word means to bring up the rear and or behind, but no, it gives you the idea of something in constant pursuit. In fact Charles Haddon Spurgeon likened "goodness and mercy" to being chased by two guard dogs and Bishop G.E. Patterson said "goodness and mercy" was like having two escorts. David say's "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside still waters, and restores my soul. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, you anoint my head with oil, and my cup overflows. Here is where it gets good...what this white theologian (Charles Spurgeon) and this black theologian (G.E. Patterson) both knew and understood was for those in Christ Jesus "Surely goodness and mercy shall guide me and escort me right into the very presence of God. And when I see my savior face to face I shall sit my crown down at his feet and say "Hallelujah...Hallelujah, I thank God for saving me". "Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever".

About seventy years ago if you would have walked down the Florida coastline around 6pm, and stopped right where the sand kisses the water you would have seen an old man with a white bucket. If you looked closer you would have seen a flock of seagulls swarming around his head as he tossed up pieces of shrimp. His name was Eddie Reichenbacher, an old war pilot who was retired. Wanting to fly again, he boldly wrote the president a letter...pleading to send him on one last mission. The president agreed and off went Eddie with his crew down to the south pacific. On their flight back their plane malfunctioned and crashed, leaving Eddie and his crew stranded on a yellow life raft. Being on that raft for eight days without food and water, Eddie decided to have a "come to Jesus meeting", knowing that they would

not survive much longer. After their prayer meeting he sat back to relax, but then he felt some pecking on his head. He said to himself “that a seagull, if I can catch it and kill it, it can be food for the crew and me”. He caught the seagull, killed it, plucked out the feathers and fed him and his crew. He then used the guts and entrails for fishing bait. By doing this they survived on that raft for another twenty-one days before being rescued and brought back to America. They say if you would have walked down the Florida coastline about seventy years ago around 6pm, and stopped right where the sand kisses the water. You would have seen old Eddie Reichenbacher and his white bucket, tossing up shrimp. But they said; if you got close enough you would hear old Eddie Reichenbacher say “thank you, thank you, thank you”. For old Eddie Reichenbacher knew that when somebody dies for you say **“THANK YOU”**.

David says “Summit, I wrote psalms 23 to let you know that life begins with God (V1) and life ends with God (V6).

David says “Summit, I wrote psalms 23 to let you know that whether in life or in death you shall never be alone, for the good shepherd shall always be with you.

David says “Summit, I wrote psalms 23 just to tell my savior thank you. For you are my provider, thank you. You are my healer, thank you. You are my redeemer, thank you. You are my guide, thank you. You are the lover of my soul, thank you. You are my shepherd, thank you.

As Richard “Arvin” Overton sat in his rocking chair some of his last words were “I’ve seen lots of living, but still good living”. As David sat on this throne, reflecting on the love of God, some of the last words he would pen in this psalm were, **surely goodness and mercy.**

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