

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
February 22, 2015
Psalm 23: The Shepherd's Provision

Memory Verse: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Psalm 23:1 (KJV)

This lesson ties in with the subject of the previous lesson. Be sure to ask for any insights they might've had this week on "the Good Shepherd." Also, take what time you need to ask for volunteers to talk about their successes and failures in spiritual disciplines we've discussed (scripture meditation, memorization, etc.). Encourage them to continue their efforts. Pray for each other.

Psalm 23: A Psalm of Peace and Provision

David begins the Psalm by saying that because God is his shepherd, he lacks nothing. "Want" in this case is a state of lacking something vital to life and health, but we see that God provides all those things. Psalm 23 is a poem about the Providence of God for those that love and follow Him. It is written, notably, from the point of view of a sheep to its shepherd, where before we discussed the Good Shepherd's point of view of the sheep. You'll notice that the two descriptions of the Good Shepherd match beautifully (despite being written centuries apart!) and help bring us closer to the understanding of just what all God does for us as our Shepherd.

1. Provides Sustenance (Psalm 23:1-3)

Life wears us down. We are not made to be indestructible and invulnerable. We are made to carry on until we have to stop for fuel, whether food or rest. Unfortunately, finding those necessities of food and rest can be hard, in the state of nature. When I use the phrase "state of nature" I mean the world as it is, since the Fall of Mankind. The life where we have to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow (Gen 3:17-19) is the state of nature. We aren't guaranteed food, shelter or even survival. Some philosophers have described this life as "nasty, brutish and short" due to the harsh conditions. Despite the fact that in the modern world we have made it much easier to make a living, earn our bread and even have hot dogs or steak every now and then, the fact remains that we must work for it. Life wears us down, and so far we're just talking about getting the necessities. We haven't mentioned toothaches or strep throat or traffic jams or bi-polar disorders or tornados or house fires or the death of loved ones. We need rest. We need peace. We need deliverance from heartache... and if God is our Shepherd, we won't lack anything. We will have cool, still water. We will have lush, green pastures. We will have restoration of our souls. We will have all that we need when we come to God as our Lord, our shepherd. Jesus himself promises that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness then all these things [the needs of life: food, clothes, peace of mind] will be given to us. (Mat. 6:33) He will give us what we need to be restored, to keep going until we need to be restored again.

We live in a state of dependence on Him for all we have. Satan would have us believe that God is stingy and that God deprives us of what is "really" good and desirable. The devil wants us to feel like we are lacking something, that God isn't enough. But God offers us the restoration of our soul. The act of "restoring" means to return it to a previous state, in our case, a state of peace that can only come from being at peace with God. Jesus laid down His life to achieve that peace and to rescue us from our sin: to restore us to our previous state before sin and to reconcile us with God. His sacrifice, His love and His grace are sufficient to save us and

to sustain us forever, and we need nothing else, no matter what our flesh or Satan might try to sell us. We shall never be in want of anything again.

2. Provides Guidance and Protection (v. 3-4)

The world can be a scary place. We often dwell too long on thoughts of the moral condition of our nation, our dangerous involvement in wars and disputes abroad, our financial situation as a country, as a world, world hunger, human trafficking, drug cartels and all manner of calamities and evil exist in this world. There is a great deal of darkness and David had seen a lot of it in his time as well. The valley of the shadow of death. This is poetic language for “as dark as it gets.” If you think Death is dark, then imagine its shadow, then imagine that being in a valley, hidden from the sun. When it can’t get any worse and the situation could not be more grim. David had been there. Hiding away in mountain caves from a crazed King Saul. Barely surviving with his men, but risking death every time he showed his face in the land. But in the face of all his troubles and the threats he faced, David did not fear them because the Lord was leading him. The Lord was his shepherd.

The rod and staff that comfort David are God’s sovereignty and God’s power. God retains the sovereign authority to do what He wills with anything that is. God created all the matter, anti-matter, dark matter, quantum matter and whatever else that is; All that is owes its existence to Him. God controls the spinning of atoms all the way up to the spinning of clusters of galaxies. He controls and sustains them. Neither the death of a star nor a sparrow can escape His notice. David puts his trust in THAT God. David doesn’t say the Lord is his shepherd so then there will never be evil, hard times or calamities. David doesn’t say that because it’s not true. What David says is that he will not be afraid. He will not lose hope and give up even in the midst of the deepest darkness the world can muster. Why? Because the Lord is his shepherd. Because the Lord is with him through it all, especially in the hard times. Because the Lord carries all power and authority in Heaven and in Earth. That truth comforted David and it can comfort us as well.

Jesus says “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand...” David says “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” The Lord isn’t our shepherd because we’re so great. He doesn’t rescue us from our sins, clean us up, feed us, clothe us and protect us because we deserve it. He does it because that’s who He is and that’s what He does. His Name is His Glory and it will never suffer loss. For the sake of His reputation and identity as Savior, Lord, Guide and all else He is as God Almighty, for that sake He provides for us and leads us and protects us. As the maximally Good, Perfect, Moral and Powerful Being, God loves us because it is His will to do so, and God has the power to do as He pleases! Praise God!

3. Provides Eternal Security (Psalm 23:5-6)

“I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (v.6)

David knows that his place is with the Lord because God has chosen him. David knows only God’s hospitality can account for the blessings, protection and provision he has received in his life. Goodness, mercy, abundance, honor, prestige amongst friend and foe: these are all due to God’s favor that has been lavished upon David. God’s favor is abundant and will never change and His place as a guest at God’s table is something that David knows he can count on eternally.

The same promise stands for us. Thanks to Christ’s sacrifice for us, we can be with Him in His kingdom and enjoy His presence eternally. Not only that, but God’s “goodness and mercy” won’t just start in Heaven, but it will follow us all the days of our lives. Jesus came that we “may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Jesus didn’t save us just to go to Heaven or else He could have just sent us on, right then! Jesus cares

not only about us, but about the world around us as well. He wants to give us abundant life so that we can share what we have with others, in this life. Not just a ticket to God's table, though that is guaranteed, but a relationship with Him as a Father, a Provider and a Guide throughout a blessed life of love and service to Him. God wants to be our Shepherd, now and forever!

Ezekiel 34:11-15

¹¹ *“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord.*

Take Home: So What?

- Realize that no matter what happens in this life, that God will be there for you if you have acknowledged Him as Lord and Shepherd of your life. No matter how dark, He will lead you through it in paths of righteousness if you'll only follow Him.
- Understand that all manner of sustenance comes from God. Physical needs, Emotional needs, Spiritual needs: Anything that gives us health and rest and contentment comes from God and Him alone. As our Shepherd, He is our only source of provision.
- Remember God's promise that one day He will gather all His people together and He will set His dwelling place with us and we will be His people and God himself will be with us and be our God. (Rev. 21:3) or as David said "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Praise God for that!