

The Lord is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

Everton Hills

6 August 2017

The year is 1998. Anne-Marie and I are about to become parents for the first time. Oscar is born. But something is wrong. **The doctors and nurses move with determined precision.** He has an Apgar score of 1 and after 5 minutes that has risen to 3.

The Lord is my Shepherd.

Three years later. It's Coopers turn. In the womb he has been hyperactive. I don't know whether they can diagnose ADHD in utero. But if they could he would. But now it comes to the birth. We can see his head. But something is wrong. He can't come any further. He has moved so much that he his umbilical cord has wrapped itself around him twice. And with a knot. After more determined precision, his umbilical cord is cut... He has an Apgar score of 2.

The Lord is my Shepherd.

As you can tell, both boys have turned out 'mostly' OK.

But this Psalm, Psalm 23, is such a statement of hope and promise, that in years gone by, people memorised it.

In the midst of tragedy. In our darkest of nights. In those moments when we feel as though nothing is going right and all is wrong... to hear "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" is to hear a promise that the creator of the world has not and will not let you go.

That was King David's experience.

If you know much about King David's life, he was not always the confident giant slayer that is communicated to us as children. He was a man who was riddled with all sorts of doubts and anxieties in his life.

Doubts and anxieties. They have a tendency of taking control of us.

Doubts and anxieties. We often find ourselves responding to them in weird and inappropriate ways. For example, an article that I read last week makes the case that the growing use of pornography among men is a response to a blokes yearning for closeness and intimacy – and their not knowing how to do that. The authors suggested that a man's fear of physical contact in public, fear of being vulnerable, can lead him to make poor choices in private.

It is true. **Our doubts and anxieties have a tendency to take control of us.**

Think about it in your own life. Spend a few moments talking with the person next to you about how you tend to respond to doubt and anxiety. Do you get louder? Do you shout? Do you push back? Do you binge on things that are less than healthy? When you are under stress, when you are worried, what do you do?

(PAUSE)

That's why **Psalm 23** is such an important Psalm for us today. We might not understand the significance of shepherds or sheep – it's not as though they are walking down the middle of our street, or grazing on our college oval. But we do understand the significance of having someone there, looking out for you, being there for you, helping you!

And that was David's experience.

David was a person, just like you and me, who fretted about all sorts of situations... Who knows what he was thinking when he saw Bathsheba bathing on the roof top – and why he responded the way he did. Who knows why he feigned madness when King Achish of Gath's men started chanting "Isn't he the one the people honor with dances, singing, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"

But it is thought that this whole thing of Saul trying to kill him is the background for this psalm.

The thing is, there comes a point when you either thrive or die. When you either give in to your fears and let them control you... or you take control of them and tell your fears where to go.

And that is what happens here. That is why David writes this Psalm. He comes to the profound understanding, that it is as he reminds himself of God's goodness, of God's faithfulness... as he strengthens that memory in his life, he becomes strong enough to tell his fears where to go. So he reflects. He ponders. He notices. And he notices two things in particular... First, despite what he feels, despite what is happening around him, despite what he thinks in his head, **God is faithful and trustworthy. And second, God will always provide.**

He writes...

"The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me." (Psalm 23:1–4, NLT)

What deep and profound words. But they are more than just words. They are God's words.

And we know that God's word is always creative. He spoke and the world was created.

And then in Jesus we know that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That word that brought sight to the blind, that cast out demons in a homeless person's life. That word that welcomed the tax collector, and defended a woman from being stoned, and declared forgiveness to a whole manner of people.

That is the Word to which King David refers. It is the Word that declares that God is trustworthy in every circumstance – even when I don't feel it...

*He lets me rest in green pastures.
He calms turbulent waters.
He gives strength and hope.
He guides.*

And even though I might find myself in the darkest of places... like when someone I know is dying, or my new born child is struggling to find life, he is close beside me; protecting me.

Isn't that what we need to hear, and to tell ourselves so much of the time? God's Word is creative, and through his Word, he creates life and hope and salvation.

And that is what David refers to next...

“You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.” (Psalm 23:5–6, NLT)

How cool is that? In the midst of my fear and my anxiety, you know, the fear or anxiety that often leads me to make poor choices, do dumb things... in that midst, he prepares a feast. He tells my fear and anxiety to clear off. Not only that... he gives that fear and anxiety the 'what for'... he helps me to see that 'my cup does indeed overflow with blessings'.

And then David concludes, and these words are words that we need to hear ourselves time and time again...

“Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.” (Psalm 23: 6, NLT)

His goodness and unfailing love pursue me.

They pursue me.

Like a loving parent who continues to be gracious and generous even when their children tell him to 'F off, that's what God does! He pursues them. In a good way. And as we discover in Jesus, not only does he pursue them, he dies for them. He gives up his life for them.

Cast your minds forward some 1000 years from David's birth. Another person is born. And this person also talks about sheep. After talking about wanting to give his people life, and life in all its fullness, Jesus says...

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11, NLT)

That is the reason why a new dad, in the middle of one of the most worrying and anxious times of his life can declare, **“The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want”**.

And it is the reason why we can ... even today, be confident in God's presence in the most haranguing and harassing of moments... because not only is the Lord my Shepherd... I also will not want.