

Psalm 23 The Goodness of God in Providing for His People (part 1)

Abigail and I once read a book about boy who ran away from his farm at a young age and was raised by Indians for many years. And though he learned to speak Crow, and hardly thought in English, certain words kept coming back in his thoughts and his dreams. They were: ***“The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.”*** And only years later, after he was united with his siblings, was he reminded of the rest of the words, the words of Psalm 23. And this Psalm becomes the unifying theme of the entire book. If you are like me, you may have memorized this Psalm as a child. If not, you’ve certainly heard it quoted in a book, at a funeral, or during a difficult time. And there is good reason! These words, written by David at a time of peace in his life, recall the GOODNESS of God. And his goodness is seen in how he provides for his people. Today, there is nothing more comforting, more assuring, more beautiful to the child of God than to know your God is good and he cares for you! And as NC Christians, we know that All God’s blessings come down to us through Jesus. I have 7 ways we see the goodness of God (3 this week and 4 next). And I pray they will be helpful to you, as they have been to me this week.

1. God is good to provide the physical needs of his people. Look at v. 1. ***“The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.”*** The picture is clear. To David, God is his shepherd. I don’t know anything about being a shepherd except what I read. But, David did. This was his trade, his occupation, his life, before being anointed as Israel’s king. There was nothing he understood more in life than being a shepherd. It was in the fields where God taught David the lessons of life. And he remembered how, as a shepherd he provided for his lambs. He led them to eat in pastures with abundant grass and peaceful, still waters.

I remember when we lived in Nairobi, Kenya. And just south of Nairobi, actually joining with the city, was the Nairobi National Park. And the Massai Tribe lives in that area. And they are shepherds. They keep cattle, goats, sheep, etc. And when there is drought, when there is no grass and water for their herds, they lead them north into the mountains of Nairobi, which in their language, means “cool water.” There, they could find grass and water for their provision.

In the same way, God is the one who provides for his people physically. Now, it also true that God provides for all the peoples of the world. He brings the rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous. And because of this, ALL should give thanks. But, there are times when he gives special providence in physical needs to his people. In Egypt, the Israelites were protected physically from the plagues. The prophet Elijah as he ran from King Ahab, was fed by the ravens (1 Kings 17:4). And later, God used a widow to feed him. I think of Jonah as God provided the whale to save his life and later as he sat outside Ninevah, when God caused a vine to grow over his head to give him shade (Jonah 1; 4). I think of Jesus after his 40 days of fasting when the angels attended to him (Mark 1:13). There are many examples. And doesn’t Jesus say, ***“Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”***²⁶ ***Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”*** (Matt. 6:25-26). And in Phil. 4:19 we read:

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Today, God will provide for you. Don’t worry!

2. God is good to provide the spiritual needs of his people. Look at v. 3. **“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”** In this verse, we see 2 ways God provides for the spiritual needs of his people. First we see the powerful work of God upon our souls. When David says, **“He restores my soul”** He is moving WAY beyond the abilities of a human shepherd. Sure, a human shepherd can affect how the sheep feels because of physical needs, but ultimately, only God can care for the soul. I think David was thinking about all the difficulties of life, all his times he ran from Saul, all the bloodshed of war with his enemies, all the family issues with his sons and daughters, even the rebellion of Absalom. And, he considered his own sin against his family, his people, his friends, his adultery, his lying tongue, his murder. ALL OF THESE THINGS covered his soul like the deepest ocean. But, by faith David trusted the promises of God, and by the Spirit, God restored his soul. God brought peace to his heart. This is a spiritual truth!

From one perspective, EVERY soul needs restoration. From the fall of Adam the spiritual nature of man is spoiled. It is fallen. It is corrupt. The effects of that first sin upon our natures run deep into the depths of our souls. As we look honestly into our hearts and consider our sins we must cry out with the Apostle Paul, ***“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*** (Rom. 7:24). In our natural self, because of our sins, there is an enmity, a hostility, an animosity, that fights against God. And this is a problem that goes down to the depths of who we are (our souls). From this perspective our souls need to be restored. And if our souls are not restored, we will perish. We will die without God. **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom.3:23). **“The wages of sin is death . . .”** (Rom. 6:23). And the only one who can restore our souls is God. As Christians, we know that He restores our souls through the person and work of Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). So today, if you are in Christ, your soul is restored. **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** (2 Cor. 5:17). Because of his death and resurrection Christ has broken down the wall of separation between your sinful soul and God. The punishment your soul deserved because of your sins has fallen upon Christ. And his soul suffered the punishment you deserved. And if you have believed on him, your soul is restored. And only those who are in Christ know what I am talking about. You have peace with God. Your sins are forgiven.

Now, I have a question. How does this truth apply to the Christian now? If ultimately our souls are already restored in Christ, from what perspective does God “restore” our souls? When sickness comes your way, when sadness floods your soul at the death of a close loved one, when the busyness of life engulfs you, when disobedient children cause your heart to fail, when the realities of evil surround you on every side, when you see your life and you read our church covenant and you consider your sins, how do you feel? What do you do? **LOOK TO CHRIST!**, **“the founder and perfecter of your faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Heb. 12:2). **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,**

but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). **“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory”** (Matt. 12:20). He is the one who said, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** Brothers and sisters, we need Christ! We needed him at the beginning of our spiritual life. We needed him the 2nd day, the 3rd day, TODAY, and for all eternity. He RESTORES our soul! So when you are down, get away by yourself, take your Bible, and read about Christ. Consider his beauties, his compassion, his tender care, his power, his humility. And know, He lives to restore your soul!

Now, I said we see two ways God provides for his people’s spiritual needs in this verse. The 2nd is this. He tells us how to live. **“He leads us in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”** God does not leave us without clear instructions as to how to live! Every time David thought of God’s commands, God’s instructions, God’s words, he was thankful for God’s goodness. There is so much to say here, but I want to keep moving through this Psalm. Let me just read one verse from 2 Pet. 1:3: **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . .”** (2 Pet. 1:3). Today, God blesses his people with spiritual needs. And He does all this for his own names sake. God will not leave his people. He promised! And his name is at stake. As Christians, we shall not want!

3. God is good to provide protection for his people. Look at v. 4. David says, **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”** After v. 1, and maybe the Lord’s Prayer, this may be the most quoted verse in the Bible in times of need, for Christians and non-Christians. The picture David gives us is “deadly shade.” Have you ever been hiking in the woods and come across a cave, or some large hole that seems to continue into the darkness. It is dark and shady. And it brings fear to your soul. As you know I like to play disc golf. Well, at one course I play, there is a hole where there are some very large rocks that head down toward a creek that form small, but deep caves. And if you throw your disc over there you may lose it. And it is scary to think what lives down in those holes, what snakes must be there. I don’t want any part of those caves. It is shady. It is dark. There is unknown danger. And David himself spent much time in deep caves running from Saul. Though death surrounded him, because of the goodness of God to comfort him during those times, he did not fear. He knew that his protection came from God almighty.

In the same kind of way, God guards our soul! He protects it from ultimate harm; safe and secure from all alarms. What an amazing fact! The God of the universe protects his people. Now, let me ask: *“Does this mean God always protects us from physical harm?”* Of course not! David was protected physically and lived a long life. But, what about the prophets of the OT? Most of them were killed. Eleven of the first 12 disciples were martyrs, and one of them was exiled. Paul was imprisoned many times and died a martyr’s death. Many of the missionaries we read about lost loved ones and died at young ages (I think of Helene Roseveare.) Our brothers and sisters are being killed all over the world. AND, the ONE God loves the most, his only Son, He turned his back on him as he died the most horrible death in the history of the world.

Our lives are short and full of troubles. Listen to me carefully. It may be the will of God that you suffer greatly. None of us escape the sinful effects of this world. And ALL of us will die at a young age, a middle age, or an old age. And if they persecuted our Lord, they will persecute his followers! Yet, this verse teaches that God is good to protect his people. So how does He protect us?

Well, I believe there are times when God protects his people physically (and in other ways). I can recall so many times God has protected me physically. And I do believe God's people have protection from physical death at least until they become Christians. Doesn't the Book of Hebrews speak of the protection angels give to the people of God when it says in 1:14, "**Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?**" But, after salvation has come, what about God's protection. I think the Bible is clear on this. God protects his people from spiritual death. Sometimes this is called the 2nd death.

We see this especially in the Book of Revelation. Rev. 2:11: "**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.**" Rev. 20:6: "**Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.**" At the end of this age we read about what will happen to Satan (and his followers). Rev. 20:14: "**Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.**"

As Christians today, I think we tend to dwell too much on the physical and maybe we fear death much more than we should. But, our Lord Jesus has conquered death and the grave. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Jesus is the RISEN LORD! And because of his life, we have life. Because he rose from the dead, we will rise with him. Listen to the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 15:55: "**O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?**" ⁵⁶ **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.** ⁵⁷ **But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** ⁵⁸ **Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."**

One of my prayers for you comes from Eph. 1. Here Paul prays for 3 specific things. 1) That we may know the hope of our calling; 2) That we may know our inheritance; and 3) that we may know the great power that God is working in us by his Spirit. Let me read just a couple verses. Eph. 1:19: Paul prays, "***I want you to know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.***"

As new covenant Christians, God protects us from ultimate harm. Our lives are in the hands of God. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil. For God is with us. He will comfort us with his almighty power. And though we die, physically, we will be

with him forever in heaven where He will do good to us forever! God is good! He provides for our physical needs. He provides for our spiritual needs. He protect us from ultimate harm!