

Psalm 23 The Goodness of God in Providing for His People (part 2)

Psalm 23, one of the most quoted chapters in the Bible, is full of truths about the goodness of God in providing for his people. As the great shepherd of his people God provides, as we have seen, for the physical needs of his people, the spiritual needs of his people, and he gives protection to his people. And this protection can come physically. But, God's ultimate protection comes as he protects our souls from the second death. ***"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of sin and death, I will fear no evil."*** He protects our souls from spiritual death. And this protection comes through the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ as he laid down his life as a sacrifice in the place of his sheep, so they might have life. The ultimate fulfillment of this Psalm is Christ, who said in John 10:11: **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."** Today, I have 4 more truths about God's goodness in providing for his people. (comfort, sustain, mercy, ALWAYS)

1. God is good to provide comfort for his people. Look at v. 4: ***"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."*** This verse speaks about protection. God will protect his people. But, God's protection doesn't stop with mere physical safety. It goes so much deeper. It leads to comfort. David says, ***"your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*** Now, "rod" and "staff" are the same physical piece of wood. The rod is used to help the shepherd guide the sheep and nudge them along to keep them in line. But, as a staff, it was used to physically beat off wild animals. I am sure, in his many years as a shepherd, David remembered the how he led the sheep, guiding them to drink and eat, leading them through dangerous valleys. And, he remembered the lions, the wolves, the wild animals that tried to take his sheep. He remembered that this protection brought comfort to his sheep. And David thought of God in the same way as he considered his own life.

Now, the kind of comfort David is talking about here is not like the comfort you feel when you've been outside in the cold for a few hours and you come inside your warm house and sit beside the fire. Instead, it is a comfort that God gives to the soul, a comfort that ONLY God can give. And only those who have felt this comfort know what David is talking about. In this Psalm, this comfort comes in the very shadow of death. Now, It isn't that David was not scared. For I am sure, he was scared at many times. Nevertheless, he found comfort for his soul, knowing the Good Shepherd would not leave him.

I think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were about to be thrown in to the fiery furnace because they would not bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. He said to them, ***"Bow down or you will be killed in the fiery furnace."*** But they refused and said, ***"We will not do this. And our God can deliver us. But, even if he does not, we will not bow down."*** Now, we know the story. They did not bow down; he threw them into the furnace. And it was so hot that the men who threw them into the furnace died. But, as Neb looked into the furnace, God sent an angel who Neb called "a son of the gods" to protect his people. But, the point is this: Even if they were to die in the furnace, they did not care. God was with them. And though they were scared, they found comfort in the midst of trial.

Now, let me try and apply this for us. As I look through the Scriptures we find a lot of verses that speak about God giving comfort to his people. And there is a common theme with those who receive comfort. Those who receive comfort have a certain spirit about them, a particular kind of heart. What do you think it might be? Are there any verses that come to your mind? Let's begin with Matt. 5:4. Jesus says, "**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**" Those who receive comfort are those who mourn. If this is true, I want to be a person who mourns! So what does it mean to mourn? To mourn is not to cry like a baby that wants something to eat or drink. To mourn is not to cry or throw a tantrum when you don't get your way. To mourn is not to get upset when you get caught doing something you shouldn't do. To mourn is not simply to complain when things in your life aren't going well.

To truly mourn is to have a heart for the holiness and righteousness of God and to feel the effects of sin in this world. The person who truly mourns sees a holy God and acknowledges his own sin, his own depravity and to think, "*Oh what a wretched person I am.*" And it doesn't stop here. The person who mourns sees the sin in this world, and all its effects; sickness, poverty, hurting people, wars, injustice (like abortion); The one who mourns sees broken families, stressed out lives, people living this life with no lasting purpose, except to get the next paycheck. And then, after considering these things, there is a crying that happens in the heart. And to the one who truly has this heart attitude, God will give comfort. And this comfort leads to real joy in this life and the life to come.

One quick illustration. Have you ever lost a pet to death? All of us know what that feels like. Now, have you ever lost a loved one to death? Of course you have. How did you feel? We know that feeling. This was a kind of mourning. Well, in much the same way, this is what it should feel like when we think of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of this world. This is the true heart of a child of God. And God will comfort those who mourn. And as Christians, we know this comfort comes in the person and work of Christ.

When Jesus began his public ministry he went into the synagogue and picked up Isaiah reading these words: "**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified**" (Is. 61:1-3). In this world, comfort comes to those who mourn. And this comfort is the good news of the Gospel. God forgives the sinner and gives comfort to his people. In this way, God is so good!

2. God is good to sustain his people. Look at v. 5. In this verse David moves from the picture of a shepherd to that of a host: "**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.**" In that culture there were often great banquets. And the really big banquets were put on by really rich people. The person who put on the banquet was known as the master. And those who were invited to such banquets were treated with great luxuries. The honored guests were given special privileges where they were often anointed with oil. The food and wine was in abundance.

We don't really get this in our culture. The closest we get is grandmas on Sunday or possibly a catered meal for a wedding reception. I remember once in Tatarstan where Tim and I headed out to a village on special invitation to attend a teachers' end of the year banquet. And it turned out, **WE WERE THE HONORED GUESTS!** They brought us in and introduced us to all the teachers, the principal of the school and the important people of the village. Then, they seated us in the middle of the table, which was absolutely beautiful; every fruit, bread, chocolate, candy, drink, you could imagine, decorated with ornate table clothes, dishes, and beautiful glasses. And all this before the main course. And though they wanted us to drink their vodka (which we didn't) our cup certainly overflowed. This banquet included luxury, abundance, entertainment, and even great honor to us as guests, **EVERYTHING WE NEEDED!**

Now, this is the picture David is giving us. Except, David's banquet is pictured in the middle of a war surrounded by enemies. And the master of the banquet isn't just a man. He is Master of the Universe. God Himself is the great host! I think the point is this: God is good to sustain his people in this life and provide all our needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. And he doesn't sustain us merely with bread and water. He gives the best things to us. And his provision is in abundance, expensive oil, overflowing cup, full table. This goes back to verse 1: **"I shall not want."**

Brothers and sisters. **LIFE IS WAR!** Look around and you will see. The nations are raging. Poverty, injustice, heartache, sickness, broken marriage, depression, addictions, hurt in families, sin in churches, and the list goes on. **LIFE IS WAR!** **"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"** (Eph. 6:12). And in this picture God is saying to us in this life, *"Stop, take a break. Sit down at my table. Feast on my goodness! When your enemies hate you, I will love you. And you know I love you. For I sent my only Son in the flesh to live the life you could not live and die the death you could not die. And because of Him, when your enemies do evil to you, I will do you good! As you need sustenance when your soul is famished, I will give you good food; not simply bread and water, but steak and vegetables. When you want to give up on life, come to my table. When you feel you can't continue at such a pace, come to my table. I WILL prepare it for you. I will do good to you! This is my delight."* And in this way, God keeps us going. He sustains us!

And, you know what? This is no trouble for him to do this for us! He owns everything! And **ALL** of what he has he will give to us because of the person and work of Christ! **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ . . ." (Eph. 1:3-9).**

Rev. 19:9 says: **“And the angel said to me, write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, these are the true words of God.”** The marriage supper of the lamb has begun NOW while our enemies are still around.

3. God is good to give mercy to his people. Look at the first part of v. 6: **“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life . . .”** Here, David links goodness with mercy. God is good to give mercy to his people. Here, David is remembering his own life, his own sin, how he deserved punishment and separation from God. I am sure he recalled his sin with Bathsheba, how he took another man’s wife, lied about it, and eventually having her husband killed and then taking her as his own. Now, I know there are cultural differences between their culture and ours. But, sin was sin in their culture. And sin is sin in our culture. In any case, God says, *“Do not commit adultery!” “Do not murder.” “Do not covet.” “Love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”* Etc.

From the fall of man and for all eternity, I believe the mercy of God is the greatest place his goodness is shown. There is nothing more good than the mercy of God in forgiving our sins! For which of us have not committed adultery in our hearts. Husbands, which of you has been faithful with your eyes, your minds, your hearts, with all the beautiful women in this world? Which of us has not hated in our hearts both our friends and our enemies? Which of us has always been content with what God has given us? Which of us has not tried to cast off God’s good rule in our lives? Which of us has told God we would do something, but the very next day, do the opposite? **THE ONLY REMEDY TO SIN IS THE MERCY OF GOD**, not giving us what we deserve! And this is good!

The best times in prayer are when I see this truth and feel it down deep in my soul! One of my friends in seminary always said, “the best words in the Bible are: BUT GOD . . .” Let me read those in context from Eph. 2. **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace have been saved . . .”** Today, there is nothing more good than the mercy of God in Christ! And this mercy is only found in Christ!

4. God is good too his people, ALWAYS! Look at 2nd part of v. 6 again: **“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”** For eternity, God will be good to his people. God delights in doing good to his people! And this is a great motive for future grace, brothers and sisters, knowing that God will be good to you forever! David looked to the future, AND to heaven. In other words, his eyes were fixed upon heaven; heavenly place, heavenly city, heavenly blessings, the place where God is. We must do the same! This means that all the goodness, all the blessings, all the provisions of God, are designed to bring praise to his name forever. God is good to provide for his people! And how do we know that God will be good to us forever! We know because he sent his Son (transition to Lord’s Supper).