

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

These notes are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye, mistakes can possibly be found. Therefore, he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabible.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabible.org).

**Date:** March 4, 2018

**Sermon Title:** Finding Rest in God’s Provision

Sermon Series: The Theology of Rest

Text: Psalm 23

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©2018

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

Date: March 4, 2018  
Title: Finding Rest in God's Provision - A Theology of Rest - Why Jesus Matters  
Text: Psalm 23  
Theme: Because Jesus is our Shepherd there is no want, thus there is no fear in our uncertainties whether immediate or long-term.

**Introduction:**

As we noted last week, the Psalms are songs. As such, they have an intended emotional response/target.

The Bible tells a single *Story* and at the center of this *Story* is Jesus. What we read of in Genesis and Revelation is reflected in this Psalm. It is as if the *Story* is this enormous magnet and as it passes over the parts they all jump off the page and connect to the *Story*. When I read Psalm 23, I hear Genesis and Revelation. I hear the Lord's Prayer.

Let us see if we can't hear this *Story* and feel this Psalm.

We are operating on two levels. The first level is that of the horizontal. The horizontal is the realm of shadow. The horizontal is our world of the tangible, the concrete. Here, we have circumstances and situations that cause us stress and alarm and anxiety. The second level is that of the vertical. The vertical is the realm of the substance. The vertical is our world of the spirit, the soul, the immaterial, and the non-tangible [or at least this is what we think]. Yet, it is the vertical where our most essential questions need addressing. It is out of the substance that we have our greatest challenge in the horizontal.

The entire Bible speaks of God's provision. This text tells us that God's provision enables us to live without want. God gives us rest. His person gives rest and His provision gives rest and it is our desire to see how His provision provides me rest.

Why the shepherd/sheep imagery? First, sheep are pretty much dependent on the abilities of the shepherd. Left to themselves, they will die. Second, shepherds are tied directly to the sheep. Their complete survival and well-being are tied to the shepherd. In their absence, they will die. The shepherd carries all of the responsibility in the relationship. The sheep have none.

If we were living in that context, the imagery would be most natural. When we visit our daughter in New Zealand, sheep and cattle are pervasive. There are approximately six sheep per person and three cows per person. In the USA, we have roughly 6 million sheep with 330 million people! Thus, our passage/psalm would have immediate connection with the reader on every level: emotional, physical, and financial. The relationship between the two was literally life and death.

Question 1 will follow questions 2.

**2.** How does the **context inform the meaning** of this passage? Answer this question using a) the *literary context* (the passages on either side), b) the *historical context* (circumstances and culture of the audience), and c) the *biblical context* (connections to other places in the Bible).

*Literary Context:*

If we were to group the Psalms topically or by theme, Psalm 23 would be called “A Psalm of Trust.” In God’s overarching Providence, however, Psalm 23 follows Psalm 22 and precedes Psalm 24. Psalm 22 is famous for verse 1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” and Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the LORD’S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”

How is it that we move from the groaning of Psalm 22 to the Psalm of Praise that is Psalm 24? It is not an accident that tying these two Psalms [one of great emotion and the other of enormous intellectual affirmation] is Psalm 23 where our volition shows itself.

*Historical Context:*

David is the Shepherd King who pulls from his own experience to communicate His deep trust in YHWH as His Shepherd.

*Biblical Context:*

Think Matthew 9:35-38.

<sup>35</sup>“Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. <sup>36</sup> **Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.** <sup>37</sup> Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest’” (Matt. 9:35-38).

Think Ezekiel 34:1-16 [Read].

At the end of the day, God is the one who is ultimately watching over and caring for His sheep. Yet, He has put His people over His flock and He fully expects them to care for them. This is the language of the New Testament.

Notice this progression and emphasis inside of the New Testament as it relates to the Pastors/Elders of the local church.

John 21:16, 17	Acts 20:28	Eph. 4:11	1 Pet. 5:1, 2
----------------	------------	-----------	---------------

**1.** What is the **author's structure** of this passage? Please a) show *sections with verse references*, b) state the *author's emphasis*, and c) explain what *strategies* you used to see this structure.

*Author's Emphasis:*

Because Jesus is our Shepherd there is no want, thus there is no fear in our uncertainties whether immediate or long-term.

*Author's Strategies:*

Synonymous Parallelism / Climatic Parallelism

"We cannot fail to note the intense individuality of the psalm and that, while the Shepherd's gracious provision is detailed, the emphasis is upon the Giver rather than upon the gifts; the Person is greater than the provision."<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 23 is very personal. There are no references to "we" or "us" or "they," but only "my" and "me" and "I" and "You." Five times "my" is used (vv. 1, 3, 5, 6). Four times "I" is used (vv. 1, 4, 6).

*Author's Structure:*

I. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want (vv. 1-3).

The following four statements are saying the same thing. They describe what "not wanting" looks like. They speak to how the Shepherd cares for His sheep in such a way that they "do not want."

This is what the good shepherd does so the sheep are not in want.

- <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- He leads me beside still waters.
- <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul.
- He leads me in paths of righteousness

The first two are very concrete, they are shadow in the horizontal. They are there to help us understand the essential nature of what the shepherd does. There is no possible way apart from this action by the shepherd that the sheep will survive. The second two are the real issue. The green pastures and still waters are really about soul care. God is going to take care of your soul.

The next statement answers the "why" of our Psalm.

for his name's sake.

Here is what is at stake. The question asked is, "Can this Shepherd take care of His sheep?" The state of His flock reflects either poorly or well on the Shepherd. If you and I were to see a flock of sickly sheep ill cared for, we would not blame the sheep, but the shepherd. In fact, neglecting animals is criminal.

Friends, how we as a fellowship care for God's sheep is a reflection on our Chief Shepherd. There is a second thought in our text.

II. The LORD is my shepherd I shall not fear (vv. 4-6).

"Why does David switch from talking about God with 'He' to talking to God with 'You,' and why does it happen in v. 4? Why didn't he just go on to say, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for He is with me; His rod and His staff, they comfort me?'" May I suggest that the change "He" to the more intimate "You" happens in v. 4 precisely because it's there he speaks of the valley he has walked. He has felt the shadows closing in. Verse 4 describes the crisis points in his life. And in those times, something deep happened between him and God. You've noticed it too, haven't you? We're more prone to talk about God when we are in the green pastures and more prone to talk to God when we're in the dangerous ravine. In the light, we are prone to wander off in pursuit of greener grass. But in the dark, we hug His knee. David changes from comments about God to communion with God because during his valley time, he stayed ever so close to the Shepherd, never taking his eyes off Him. He had experienced God in a way there that had ushered him toward intimacy with the Almighty Shepherd."<sup>2</sup>

There is a vital connection between these two parts. The idea that we might have need causes us to fear. "How will we care for ourselves and those under us?" A single parent, an unemployed primary caregiver, an aging parent, a widowed individual. These are the scenarios that cause us need and thus fear. This text assures us that God as our Shepherd meets our needs, thus cancels out our fears.

There is a shift in the image. There are two parts to the picture. It is described in two ways but say the same thing.

A. <sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through **the valley of the shadow of death**, I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;

Perhaps our greatest need confronts us at death. It is this need that causes our greatest fear.

Why need I not fear? Because my Shepherd is with me.

your rod and your staff,  
[this is not punitive, but protective. He defends us against the lion and the bear]  
they comfort me.

Notice how "death" is described in verse 5 as an "enemy." Can we not hear this same language in 1 Corinthians 15 where death is described as our last enemy?

- 1Co 15:25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.
- 1Co 15:26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Right now, as the **ascended enthroned reigning Christ** death has been defeated (2 Tim. 1:9, 10; Heb. 2:14), but there is a fuller expression of its demise that is still waiting for the return of Jesus (Rev. 19; 20).

Notice our Psalm. There is an intentional parallelism throughout. Some of the parallelism is synonymous, but also climatic. It says the same thing, but furthers our understanding. It expands it.

Here is the surprise in our text. There is a lavishness to all of this. The language almost appears defiant. In the face of my greatest enemy, you have prepared a banquet table where life and celebration exist.

- B. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in **the presence of my enemies**;  
 you anoint my head with oil;  
 my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
 and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Notice the parallelism and progression. It all ends with "I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever." God is going to bring His people back into His Garden where they will be with Him for their joy.

**3.** In light of the emphasis of this passage in its context, state the **author's main idea** for *his audience* (in one short sentence).

Because Jesus is our Shepherd there is no want, thus there is no fear in our uncertainties whether immediate or long-term.

Let us shift for just a moment and ask the question asked of Philip by a group of spiritually hungry Greeks.

**4.** What parts of this passage **connect to the gospel** of Jesus Christ? What *particular facet of the gospel* is in view? [What are its Christological / Christo-centric contributions?]

III. "Sir, We would See Jesus" (John 12:21)

Isa. 40:9-11; 49:8-18	Ezek. 34	Luke 15	John 10:1-18	2 Tim. 2:19 [echo]	Heb. 13:20	1 Pet. 2:25 5:4	Rev. 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15
--------------------------	----------	---------	--------------	-----------------------	------------	--------------------	------------------------------------

Jesus is the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy. In Him we have the "already" and the "not yet." In the present His people need not want nor fear. Yet, a day is coming when we will

never ever want again and we will never ever fear again. May we find comfort in our moment, but long for the day of full disclosure.

The transfer to Jesus. John 10 says Jesus is the good shepherd and He is the door to His sheep. No one gets in or out except through Him. In Psalm 46 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. When your soul is under siege and the walls seem to bow and the ground cracks and the roof leaks, Jesus is standing in the gap. No one and nothing is going to get through.

Jesus is our Shepherd who meets our needs and cancels our fears. Because He is everything we need, we need not fear and we can rest.

What situation finds you wanting?  
What situation finds you fearing because of this want?

Both are answered in Jesus. He is our Good Shepherd and our Chief Shepherd who will one day enable us never to thirst or hunger again.

Friends, I speak to you not just as an under-shepherd, but also as a sheep. We can rest in our uncertainty because He is with us.

Let us pray.

**5.** In light of your gospel connection, what **argument** (one short sentence) will you make to **your audience**? What **applications** from this argument will you make for the believer? The unbeliever?

*To the believing:* Because Jesus is our shepherd there is no want thus there is no fear in our uncertainties whether immediate or long-term.

*To the unbelieving:* Jesus is the one person you need in your life to answer whatever questions you have for the immediate and long-term.

**6.** What is your **preaching outline**?

See question 1 (Structure)

## Drilling down with Simeon Principles

1. How does this vision of Christ expand on our understanding of Him in this Book, Testament, and Canon?

Book : God is our Shepherd King who cares for His flock so that they need not fear.

Canon: Jesus is our Shepherd King who cares for His flock so that they need not fear.

2. Where is the surprise in this text? You should expect the text to surprise you.

Jesus is standing in the gap against the enemies of our souls. No one and nothing will get past Him. Not only does Jesus meet my need, but He enables me to celebrate in the face of my deepest fear.

3. What is the unique contribution this text, passage, chapter make to the Book as a whole?

The God to whom I look as my refuge and strength is Jesus. Jesus is my ever present help in my time of need.

4. Always look to link the pieces to the whole.

- a. How is this text informed by the melodic line?

When we talk about this text, we must talk about Jesus. When we talk about our needs and the uncertainty and fear they cause, we must also talk about Jesus as a Shepherd who will keep our enemies out.

- b. How does it contribute to the melodic line?

It isn't that I simply survive, but I am able to celebrate in the presence of my God. In His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are the pleasures forever more.

5. Can we trust the A.I.M. of the text to be relevant, applicable, and creative / profitable?

Can we trust God to be for us what we need the most? The answer must be an emphatic yes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Clarke, *Psalms*, 79.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-crisis-lord-shepherd-psalm-23>