

Psalm 23:2-3

Theme: To live under God's care is bliss

Aim: To help people feel the goodness of God's care

^{NIV} **Psalm 23:1** A psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Introduction

- Think of your favourite animal
- Now think of your second favourite animal
- Psychology test
 - o The 1st animal is how you think of yourself
 - o The 2nd animal is your ideal spouse
- My case
 - o 1st animal – a blue whale
 - Huge
 - Majestic
 - Slightly melancholy
 - Unafraid
 - o 2nd animal – a shark
 - Make of that what you will
- I'm guessing that none of us pictured a sheep first up
- Try to picture what it feels like to be a sheep
- Hundreds of natural predators
- Subject to worms, flies and other parasites
- No defenses whatsoever
- No sense of direction
- 100%, totally, utterly, completely contingent upon the shepherd

Background – God as shepherd of Israel

- Israel were viewed as like a flock of sheep under the care of God their great shepherd

- **Genesis 48:15** Then Israel blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,
- **Psalms 100:3** Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
- David as a shepherd king
 - David was shepherd prior to being called by God
 - As king over Israel he was called to shepherd them
 - But David yet regards himself as a sheep under God's care
- This is the default way that Israel viewed themselves. Not as majestic lions or strong like oxen, but a dependent herd of senseless

The first half of Psalm 23 is inviting us to enter into the experience of what it feels like to be shepherded by God.

And as we heard from verse 1 last week, if the Lord is my shepherd then I it means lacking nothing.

Verses 2 and 3 expand on this. What does it look like to lack nothing?

But before I start, I want to emphasise something. This is a Psalm, a poem, a song. It's written not as a piece of Greek analysis or historical narrative or gospel narrative. It's a song and we are meant to feel it. So, as we go through, I'd like you to try and turn on your imagination a little bit and try to move through the fact and enter into the feeling of what it means to have the Lord as your shepherd.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures

- Lying down – safety
 - Sheep have no natural defenses
 - All they can do is run and jump
 - So to lie down means they must be very secure
- Green pastures – plenty to eat
 - A sheep's dream!
 - A banquet, a feast of grass
 - Field after field of unending, rolling green grass
- He leads me beside still waters
 - Sheep need to drink but they are not good swimmers
 - This water is quiet and still, pure and safe to drink

Illustration

- Lawn envy
- Our grass is buffalo with a bit of paspalum, some dandelions, some daffodils, and some other unidentifiable weeds.
- Ron is our next door neighbour
- His garden is immaculate. Flowers in bloom, fruit trees bearing luscious bounties
- His grass is 100% pure cooch, emerald green, like a golf course
- I overhear people walking their dogs past his house commenting on his garden and praising it
- Why is Ron's lawn so different to mine?
- Because of the gardener, why else?
- Ron spends the best part of his day tending the garden, watering it, weeding it, fertilizing it.
- Whereas I ... occasionally hit it with a lawn mower, which broke down on Christmas eve.
- Ron could keep sheep in his garden and they would be very healthy and happy.
- I think I could probably start a caterpillar farm in ours.

Application

- This picture of green pastures and quiet waters is of course a picture of God. It's the experience of living under God's care.
 - o completely unafraid
 - o completely calm
 - o complete safe
 - o completely provided for
- It's the experience of having total confidence and peace in your heart, no matter what life throws at you.

He restores my soul

- Just two words in Hebrew: **bbe_Avy> yviîp.n:**
- Nef'shey Y'Shovav
- 'My soul' - Not the modern idea of your inner person
- This word is from Genesis 2:

- NIV Genesis 2:7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a **living being**.
- This is the part of us which is life itself.
- In other words, God restores my life
- There will be times when you wander
- There will be times when you come under attack
- There will be times when yo
- u become diseased
- Any one of these things may well bring you face to face with danger or death
- Peter will expand on this more next week
- But here is the promise
 - He restores my soul
 - He returns my life to me

Illustration

- On 3rd June 2017 I was admitted to hospital in Vietnam suffering acute ulcerative colitis.
- For two weeks I lay there in hospital, unable to eat.
- Every twenty minutes I had to go the toilet to pass blood in excruciating pain. Day and night, every twenty minutes. I slept in bouts of 15 minutes at a time, if at all.
- I lost so much weight and looked so ill that my children didn't recognise me.
- A few Christian friends visited me in hospital and assured me that God was going to heal me because he needed me. Well, I was sure he didn't need me, and to be honest, not at all sure if he intended to heal me.
- At the lowest point of that time Ebony and I prayed to God and said this, "Whether I live or die, we trust you. Your will be done"
- God restored my soul.

Application

- But I want to reassure of this, if God had allowed me to die at that time it would be no less true. I would only need to modify the tense to say, "He will restore my soul".
- For in the end all of us most cross the great divide between this world life and the next.

- However many, many times God restores our soul in this short mortal existence, the promise from God remains absolute unshakeable. He will restore our soul and resurrect us from the dead.
- I had a friend in Sydney who often said that he only really began to live once he was no longer afraid to die.
- I think he's right. These two little words in Hebrew have the power to totally transform our lives from the fear counting down of days to living proactively, confidently facing any challenge.
- "He restores my soul."

He leads me in "right paths" for his name's sake

- I must say that I prefer the old version
- "He leads me in the way of righteousness for his name's sake"
- Apparently sheep are herding creatures. They follow each other blindly.
- What the heard does they all do, because they really don't possess the power of analytical thought.
- Not too unlike another mammalian creature that I can think of, actually.
- For that reason they need a good leader.
- Our modern sheep herders use motorbikes or dogs to herd them and lead the sheep where they should go.
- Otherwise, I assume that the sheep have no idea and follow each other aimlessly all over the place, often winding up in all sorts of trouble.
- Under God's care, there is clear direction.
- Because God leads us.
- He leads us along paths of righteousness.
- And he does this for his name's sake.

Illustration

- Gary Larson
 - o sheep at a dinner party
 - o don't know where to stand
 - o don't know what to eat
 - o "Oh, thank God, here comes a border collie"

Application

- Our default inclination in life is not to follow God, is it friends?
- Our default inclination is to follow the desires

- Reformation slogan, “what the heart desires, the mind justifies and the will enacts.”
- We are creatures of passion and we chase what we want.
- I’ve seen it and I’ve known it. Once your desires have attached themselves to something, it’s incredible how creative our minds can be at thinking of a justification for it. And it’s astounding how stubborn the will is once the heart and mind have been engaged in the acquisition of the object of desire.
- We need someone to lead us.
- And we need someone to lead us down the right path.
- The ways of God are not only clear, but they are good, aren’t they?

How does God do all these things?

- By his Spirit, by his word
- And they are not independent.
- The sword of the Spirit is the word of God
- Don’t fall for this furphy about Spirit filled churches and word based churches. Where the Spirit is, there is the word of God. And where the word of God is present, so is the Spirit of God.
- By that Word the Spirit nourishes us, protects us, refreshes and restores us, and leads us in paths of righteousness for the sake of God’s glory.
- As the Word of God directs our lives from without, the Spirit of God directs from within.

Illustration

- Worked for a company in London for 4 years
- I was introduced by a Christian friend who worked there
- She was the 1st Christian, I was the 2nd
- After he employed two of us, the boss would come to us every time he needed a new employee and ask us if we had any Christian friends who could fill the position
- Because he observed that the Christians could be trusted
- They didn’t squabble about their wages
- They didn’t gossip and stir up trouble
- They didn’t call in sick after a big night on the town
- They did their work to the best of their ability, then they went home
- He was not a Christian, but he was an admirer of the way that Christians lived.

- And glory to God for that. It's not because we are more clever, moral or honest than anyone else that our lives are different.
- It's because we are led!
- We are led along righteous paths.
- And well does David say, "for his name's sake"

Conclusion

- For those of us for whom this experience of God as a good shepherd is familiar, I want to invite you this morning to relish this. Let the goodness of God wash over you once again. Don't just know that God is good, feel it, enjoy it, delight in it deep down in your heart.
- AS I mentioned before, this is a poetic song about the goodness of living under God's care as our shepherd.
- You know, I think there are two alternative songs.
 - I am my own shepherd, and by my sweat I have provided
 - Rubbish
 - We have skills, who gave them to us?
 - We have strength to work hard, who blessed us with it?
 - We have education, thanks to whom?
 - We've had opportunities? How so?
 - We were born! But who created us?
 - You and I are dust particles, a vapour
 - Some of us are hard working dust particles
 - But we are still just dust
 - Every good thing we have is from God, without exception
 - There is a better song than that one.
 - It goes like this – the Lord is my shepherd.
 - The Lord is a shepherd but "he left me wanting"
 - Rubbish
 - That was the first lie ever told.
 - God said "you are free to eat of all the trees in the garden except that one" – in other words, "you're not free"
 - Our lot may have been harder than some others
 - Our lot sure was easier than a lot of others
 - But the time line is what's important
 - What and see, where the shepherd is taking us
 - To those that came out of the great tribulation in Revelation 7 the angel said, ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of

God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

- There is a better song than that. It goes like this. "I shall not be in want."