Psalm 23

As we continue studying Messianic Psalms, it's good for us to stop and read through Psalm 23. This Psalm is very familiar to most of us. We want to read it again tonight, but with an eye to how it depicts the Person and work of Jesus the Messiah.

Once again, David is the author of the Psalm we're studying. In this psalm he contemplates the blessings and benefits of being shepherded by God. As he does so, we get an excellent preview of what Jesus will do as the great and good Shepherd of the flock. We're going to see this theme over and over again. God uses David's experiences, emotions, and expressions to prophetically describe the ultimate work of Christ.

Read through the Psalm in it's entirety and then review the following discussion questions/points.

1. What does it say about us that we are described as sheep? What can we infer from this illustration?

Thoughts: We need lots of care and attention! Sheep are not strong or fierce animals. They don't have fangs or venom or claws. They are vulnerable. Without the care and protection of a shepherd we are easy prey to our enemies. We also need direction and guidance. Scripture describes us as sheep that have gone astray (Psalm 119:176, Isaiah 53:6, Jeremiah 50:6).

By describing himself and God's people as sheep, David is humbly acknowledging our weakness and dependency on God.

2. This Psalm lists many blessings and benefits of being shepherded by God. List as many as you can find and take time to meditate on each.

- PROVISION: The Shepherd sees to it that His flock is well fed and watered (see the green pastures and still waters in verse 2). This is true to the point that David says in verse 1 that he lacks nothing! When it comes to our needs, God knows them beforehand and takes it upon Himself to fill them. If we pray and ask God for something that He doesn't give us - then the simple answer is <u>that we don't need it</u>.

- DIRECTION: The good Shepherd leads His flock to where they need to go. He doesn't send them out into the right places - He Himself goes before them and shows them the way. Verse 2 says that He LEADS us to still waters. The sheep are not finding their own way. They're following the voice and guidance of the Shepherd in front of them. In this Psalm, as is the case in our lives, it's not the qualities of the environment themselves that afford blessing - it's the presence of the Shepherd Himself.

- COMFORT: The sheep are led to green pastures to ***"lie down in"***. This flock is not stuffed into a cramped pen or driven out into desolate places where the environment is harsh and unforgiving. These sheep are given safe and comfortable places to lie down in and rest. This reminds us of the great rest we enjoy in God. In Him, we cease from our striving and find rest for our souls. (see Matthew 11:28-30). Also, notice how the waters are still. This image is tranquil and serene. Storms are a picture of stress, fear, and trouble. But these still waters remind us of the peace of God's presence.

- RENEWAL: Verse 3 says that God restores our souls. Life wears us out and we are in danger of becoming weary or discouraged. But the Good Shepherd causes our hearts and minds to be renewed and restored. This is not a one time blessing either! Throughout the course of our lives God constantly revives us again and again. This revival takes place through constant communion with Him. He is the source of our life and hope. As we walk with Him daily, He sustains us and keeps us fresh.

- HOPE: David not only speaks of present blessings - but he turns his mind forward to meditate on the future mercies God has in store for him. In verse 6 he declares that goodness and mercy will follow him all the days of his life. God pursues us with good things! And notice how David is confident and certain in this regard. He says these things will SURELY be true. Even when it comes time to die, God will fill His people with hope. Verse 4 reflects on the good Shepherd's peace-giving presence even in the valley of the shadow of death. <u>There are truly NO circumstances in which God's goodness toward us will fail</u>.

- VICTORY: David fought with many enemies throughout his life. He was a man of battle and bloodshed. He understood that God was the One who fought for him and gave him success. In verse 5 he reflects on this by describing a table spread before him in the presence of his enemies and oil being poured out on his head. God owns us and declares our sonship - even in the face of our greatest enemies. He anoints us and blesses us with grace so that we triumph over sin and death. This is why Paul says, ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** (Romans 8:31).

All these blessings and benefits are ours IN CHRIST. He is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. There is no doubt at all that Jesus had Psalm 23 in mind when He spoke in John 10 about His role as the Keeper of the Father's flock. <u>That's what makes this Psalm "Messianic"</u>. The ultimate fulfillment of these words is found in Jesus Christ and His great work on behalf of God's people.

To close, take some time to read through Jesus' words in John 10:1-30. See these sayings of Jesus through the lens of FULFILLMENT. He takes it on Himself to shepherd us. And, in Him, WE LACK NOTHING!