

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Devotional Thoughts from Pastor Jim Murr...

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

(Psalm 23)

I'm sure you did not need to be told the reference of this Psalm. Almost everyone recognizes this as Psalm 23. It's kind of like the ICON of Psalms. It is often the Psalm of choice for funerals, and likely to be a Psalm that a person might begin to recite in a scary or dangerous time. Somehow this Psalm just puts people at ease. It certainly does cover all the bases for faith. It tells me that God fulfills all of my needs. He refreshes me. He leads me through life. He's with me in the scary places. He blesses me. He will never leave me, and I will be with Him forever.

Obviously, God is not an actual "shepherd," and we are not literal sheep. God is the Creator and Lord of the universe. We are human beings. Does God literally lead me to "green pastures"? What about those who spend their lives in the city? Do I really have enemies and is there an actual "table" set up in front of them? What "cup" is overflowing? I'm sure you get my point. Psalm 23 is painting a picture. It's very poetic. When I read it, I am supposed to visualize the relationship that sheep have with their shepherd. And then I am supposed to draw some conclusions about my relationship with God. I probably didn't need to explain that to you, but I did anyway.

We are, however, supposed to take the meaning of Psalm 23 literally. It does mean what it is communicating to us, even though it is talking in picture language. When I am in a close personal relationship with God, I learn to be content. When I spend time with God by being in His Word, or in prayer, or in quiet time thinking about how good God is, He takes me to a "place" that gives me peace, in spite of what is going on in the world or in my life. He "re-charges" me ("restores my soul") so that I can face the next day with renewed zeal. He teaches me the best way to live my life.

And when life becomes scary or difficult, I know that He is right there with me and will never leave me to deal with life on my own. When life's circumstances turn on me (when I am faced with "enemies" like health or financial or pandemic concerns), God tells these "enemies" of mine – these unpleasant circumstances – that I belong to Him and that He will always "fill me up" ("my cup overflows") with all of the blessings and wonderful plans that God has for me. The biggest blessing, of course, being the forgiveness of all of my sins which has been won for me by Jesus.

David is the author of Psalm 23. David was a shepherd when he was a very young man. I picture David getting the idea for this Psalm while he was sitting under a tree one day watching his sheep. All of the sudden, it struck him that God is his shepherd, and that God was taking care of him the way that he (David) was taking care of his sheep. Sheep follow the voice of their shepherd. They don't typically follow the voice of just anyone. God's voice is found in His Word, the Bible. Do you have a Bible? Are you letting God speak to you? Don't listen to the other "voices." Don't listen to the voice of fear, or despair, or doom. Listen to the Voice that says, "I love you. You are mine. I will never disappoint you."

God's peace!
Pastor Jim