

Jesus Our Shepherd-King

(Psalm 23; Micah.2:13; Mt.11:12; Lk.16:16)

- A. In Psalm 23 David pictures God as His shepherd, a reality that he was very much familiar with (2 Sam.7:8; Ps.78:70). David looked at the qualities of a good shepherd and saw parallels to the Lord's care for him.
- B. David emphasizes God's leadership in vv.2-3. In each verse he highlights a benefit for those who follow Him. (see The Passion Translation v.3b)
1. While we don't know for sure when exactly David penned this Psalm, we do know that he was able to look back over certain seasons of his life and extol the truth about God's leadership
 - a. In v.2 David emphasizes the safety of the Lord's leadership. Sheep are able to rest only when they are free from fear. The idea of freedom from fear is constant throughout this Psalm. Surely, fear was a struggle for David, as it can be for all of us. This Psalm is, if nothing else, first a testimony of the Lord delivering Him from the enemy of fear.
 - b. **"He restores my soul"** -In v.3a David notes the work of restoration as a defining characteristic of God's leadership over the course of his life. Restoration speaks of healing and recovery. The call to discipleship is a promise of healing and restoration by the Lord. Noteworthy is the fact that David references seasons of great difficulty and seasons defined by healing simultaneously. The Lord is the great physician who sometimes creates a wound, much like a surgeon's incision, in order remove or repair, and He is also our healer who binds and mends. (Job.5:16; Hos.6:1)
 - c. **"He leads me in paths of righteousness"** -Again in v.3b David declares that God directs the course of his life according to what brings Him the highest degree of glory ("*...for His name's sake.*"). David recognizes that his life is not his own and that God is looking to magnify Himself through David's weaknesses. The challenge is seen when we realize that God is leading, and requiring, not forcing, us to follow Him. Although God's leadership involves moments where we don't recognize what He is doing or where is going David assures us that God's character can be trusted.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." -Rom.8:28

C. Jesus referred to Himself as *the* good shepherd (Jn.10:11,14) and required that His disciples would follow after Him. Belief in Jesus is where we begin, discipleship in Jesus is where this belief is to lead us.

1. Sheep follow only those they trust. Jesus is claiming to be trustworthy when He describes Himself as a good shepherd. Discipleship is based on trust. For some, they follow Jesus because they are afraid of His retribution if they don't. Others follow Jesus because they know it's the right thing to do but their hearts aren't in it. For them, Christianity is an obligation. But David emphasizes his friendship with God. This was quite a unique perspective to have in His day.

"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." -Jn.15:15

2. Friendship with God is based on revelation. God reveals Himself to those He delights in and to those who delight themselves in Him (Ps.149:4). Shepherding was not a glamorous profession by any means, but David saw God even in the dull and small parts of his life. God opened David's eyes to see His beauty and David cherished this. Ps.19 is an example of David's theology drawn from the revelation of God as seen in His creation.

D. In the gospels Jesus' leadership was often perplexing to His followers. His timing was often a mystery to them as were His methods. He even told them that following Him would bring added difficulty to their lives in certain seasons.

1. The paradoxical nature of God's leadership often causes us to question Him. Many times, Jesus said and did things in a way that made even His closest friends wonder aloud. God strengthened David's trust in Him by bringing him *through* trial. God sustained him by feeding him on the truth that he was for him and would be with him.

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." -Jn.17:15

2. God established and strengthened David in the midst of difficulty. Adversity is one the chief tools used by the Lord in forming maturity in our lives. God promised David kingship but didn't reveal to him the measure of difficulty that would accompany him along the way.

*"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."
-2 Thess.3:3*

3. It is the faithfulness of the Good Shepherd to establish our hearts in bold confidence in God in the midst of great difficulty. This is what the parable of the *House Built Upon the Rock* is all about (Mt.7:24-27).
- E. David acknowledged that God’s leadership would bring Him into seasons of difficulty, where He would be tempted to fear the threats and intimidations of the enemy. (Ac.4:28-32).
1. ***“[Even], though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”*** David didn’t wander around aimlessly in his life and end up in this particular valley-season. He was following the Lord. The apostle Paul described his ministry season in Asia with the language of extreme intensity. He and his team were bearing the weight of heightened spiritual warfare and overall despair as they walked in obedience to the will of God. *“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves”* (2 Cor.1:9).
 2. ***“You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”*** David spoke of the comfort that God’s sovereignty and correction brought to him. God’s sovereignty choosing of David enabled him to rest in seasons when it looked as if God’s plan for him was derailed. God’s correction reassured him that God was both present and active in his life.
- F. In these seasons he committed to pressing into the goodness of God for his refuge. (Eph.6:16-17)
1. ***“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*** Eph.6:16-17 speaks of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and the shield of faith by which we quench all the fiery darts of the enemy. Paul is writing in the context of spiritual warfare. The Spirit emphasizes that in seasons of escalated demonic oppression learning to hold fast and wield the truth of His word is necessary for overcoming the advance of the evil one. This is the sword of the Spirit. The shield of faith represents the grace of God to abide in His word. Faith is confidence in God in the present-tense. Our confidence in God’s affection, abilities and commitment to us act as a supernatural shield when the rage of Satan’s accusations are relentlessly launched against us to assassinate our character, God’s character and the character of others (Rev.12:10-11).

G. The Shepherd who brings break-through

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the *kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.*” -Lk.16:16 (Mt.11:12)¹

“The One who breaks open will come up before them; They will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, [even] the Lord at their head.”
-Mic.2:13

1. Jesus elaborated on this shepherd-image of God by making reference to a particular text from Mic.2:13. He highlights the idea of a *breaking-through* (which in Micah refers directly to Himself) but now interprets that passage to refer to what was taking place in His own ministry (and that of John the Baptist). Jesus’ ministry manifested facets of God’s nature and ability in a way that Israel had never experienced before. He Himself was the door to another realm (Jn.10:9). He was the ladder by which the supernatural properties of the Kingdom of Heaven were breaking into the material world (Gen.28:12, Jn.1:51).
2. Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is breaking through into the earth and the result is that many people are pressing in to lay hold of it. In seasons of adversity, we are not to draw back from God we are to reach for fullness in God. As David was seated in the presence of His enemies He was to feed on the goodness of God. In that moment, God did not remove the adversity from David’s life. Instead, He placed David at the table of His beauty and invited him to eat and drink.
3. God’s redemptive plan for humanity includes both the Kingdom of God pressing in upon individuals and individuals pressing into that Kingdom. In partnership with the Lord and His leadership, we will find that sometimes the green pastures and the still waters the God leads us to are actually in the valley of death’s shadow, surrounded by enemies. This is quite a paradox indeed. While we are mostly focused on God removing trouble and trial from our lives, He is primarily concerned with establishing His kingdom realities within us.
4. **“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life.”** What I find most fascinating from the 23rd Psalm is where God’s leadership takes David. As he followed Israel’s Shepherd, the outpouring of God’s extravagant goodness and tender mercies defined David’s life.

¹ There is some disagreement over exactly how to interpret this particular saying of Jesus. What was He actually saying? Some scholars note that the differences in Matt.11:12 and Lk.16:16 stem from a misunderstanding of the use of a particular Hebrew root word. “In Mic. 2:13 the shepherd who makes the opening in the sheep pen represents a redeemer figure who enables Israel’s return from exile. This shepherd-redeemer is called פֹּרֶץ (haporētz, “the breaker-through”); the sheep are then said to “break through” (פָּרְצוּ [pār^etzū]) after him. Playing on this imagery Jesus said (according to our take on Lindsey’s reconstruction), “The Kingdom of Heaven is increasing (פּוֹרְצֵת [pōretzet]) and breakers-through (פּוֹרְצִים [pōr^etzim]) are increasing (פּוֹרְצִים [pōr^etzim]) in it.” -Bivin, Tilton; LOY Commentary, Mt.11:12.

- a. David was overtaken by the revelation of God's beauty. It was His reward for following God and reaching for fullness in seasons of great adversity. As David looked ahead, he was hopeful in God and as he looked behind him, he was thankful in God. He had cultivated a rich history in the Lord by yielding to His leadership season after season.
5. ***"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever."*** We need to remember that in David's day there was no temple in Israel -there was no house of the Lord. There was a tent in Gibeon, called the Tabernacle of Moses, and later in David's kingship he established another tent in the city of Jerusalem which he used as a prayer-room in which he housed the Ark of the Covenant and surrounded it with singers and musicians who ministered to the Lord day and night.
6. What David longed for was to be in the courts of the Lord in the Heavenly Temple. He knew that because of the nature of God's faithful leadership -this included God's hand of discipline, He would walk in the rich blessing of God all the days of his life. But that was not the end of his story. He knew that whatever the level of his experience of God's affection, protection and provision in this life it was nothing compared to what he would walk in when he was in the Lord's immediate presence immediately after his death.
7. God shepherds us to lead us to maturity. These are His paths of righteousness. His leadership is designed to display His nature and demonstrate His character and to, as necessary, expose our weakness. He both strengthens and weakens, wounds and heals, hides and reveals -all to create the optimum scenario[s] to conform us into the image of His Son. In the 23rd Psalm David begins by rejoicing in the revelation of His friendship with God and in God's sustain provision for His life. He lauds the excellency and trustworthiness of God in seasons of adversity. He leans into the correction of God in seasons where he is tempted to wander and heralds the absolute perfection of God in preparing his heart to enjoy God forever in eternity!