

=STORIES BEHIND THE PSALMS=

Lesson 5

Psalm 23

AIM: to teach my pupils the truth of the 23rd Psalm

POINT OF CONTACT: Tell this story: Dr. Jack Hyles was on an airplane flying from Cleveland to Chicago. A lady was sitting two seats from him, and she noticed he was reading his Bible. Suddenly she began to weep and asked if she could see the Bible when he was done with it. He asked her what she would like to read, and he offered to read it to her. She began to cry and said, “Would you read the 23rd Psalm?” Dr. Hyles read the 23rd Psalm to her and asked her why she wanted to hear it read. She replied that she had just received a message that her father in Houston, Texas, had died, and she was going to his funeral. She would never see him alive again. As Dr. Hyles read the 23rd Psalm, she smiled sweetly and thanked the Lord. Millions of people have found much comfort in this great Psalm.

INTRODUCTION: In this Psalm, David likens the Lord to a shepherd and likens His people to sheep. He reminds us that the shepherd provides for every need; even so God has provided for every need of His people. How wonderful! As we go through the Psalm, you will notice how God has provided for us.

- I. BENEATH US...“GREEN PASTURES.” God provides for something beneath us. Notice the words, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,” Psalm 23:2a. Many times the shepherd would find a particular lamb that would run away. He would find the only way to keep that lamb from running off was to gently take his leg and break it over the shepherd’s knee, thereby making the lamb lie down in the green pasture. This is what this means. God oftentimes has to break our leg to make us lie down, but regardless, we have beneath us green pastures—pastures on which to feed, pastures on which to rest.
- II. BESIDE US...“STILL WATERS.” Psalm 23:2b, “He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Not only does God have something beneath us, but He has something beside us. A shepherd told me one time that a sheep would not drink from troubled waters. The waters must be still. Beside God’s people He gives still waters. This is the peace that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. Beneath us are green pastures, and beside us are still waters.
- III. IN FRONT OF US...“HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE.” Read Psalm 23:3. Ah, how sweet! Beneath us, green pastures; beside us, still waters; and in front of us is Jesus Christ, always leading. We may follow the Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows every sheep by name, and the good sheep follow the Shepherd.
- IV. WITH US...“FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME,” Psalm 23:4c. The Shepherd is always with us and comforts us with His rod and staff. The shepherd’s staff was twofold. It was used not only to help the sheep, but also to kill serpents and enemies. As a shepherd would go along beside the sheep, he would use one end of the staff to destroy serpents that would harm the sheep. Even so, Christ goes with us everywhere to destroy the serpent and to keep us close to Himself and safe from harm. How wonderful! Beneath us are green pastures; beside us are still waters; in front of us is the Good Shepherd; with us is the Lord Himself.
- V. BEFORE US...“THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME,” Psalm 23:5a. This table represents the blessed Word of God, which is always before us. God provides for our every need: something beneath us, something beside us, something in front of us, something with us, something before us. Ah, the delicacies of the Word of God! (Someone told a story about a little boy who had misbehaved and had been punished accordingly. Shortly after, it was time to eat, and his mother made him ask the blessing as punishment for being a bad boy. The little boy bowed his head and prayed, “Dear Lord, thank You that Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies!”)
- VI. UPON US...“THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL,” Psalm 23:5b. Over us is the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the oil. God always gives us His Holy Spirit to help us and to hover over us. You will

recall when Jesus was baptized, a dove came from Heaven upon Him, and a voice came from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," Matthew 3:17b. The Bible says the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. So God gives us the Holy Spirit.

Exactly what is the Holy Spirit? He is a baby-sitter. Jesus has gone to Heaven for a while. He wants someone to take care of His own. He left the Holy Spirit as the baby-sitter to care for us and to do what He would do if He were here and to do what He did while He was here until He returns. Ah, how wonderful! Green pastures beneath us, still waters beside us, the Shepherd in front of us, Jesus with us, a table before us, the Holy Spirit above us.

VII. BEHIND US... "SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE," Psalm 23:6a. This completes our protection: something beneath, something above, something before, something behind and something beside. At every possible place God has provided for our need.

When Dr. Ironside was pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, a lady kept coming to him and saying, "Dr. Ironside, two people are following me." She was having a mental problem, and she always felt like she was being followed. Finally, one day Dr. Ironside became a little impatient and said, "I know those two men who are following you." She said, "Oh, you do?" He said, "One is named 'Goodness' and the other is named 'Mercy,' and they will follow you all the days of your life." The lady found great comfort in that, and she named the two "Goodness" and "Mercy." God's goodness and His mercy do follow us!

CONCLUSION: How good God is! No matter what the need, God provides it. No matter what the problem, God solves it. No matter what the burden, God bears it. There is nothing the Christian faces but that God has provided the answer.