

THE GOOD LIFE

A STUDY OF THE 23RD PSALM

PART 5 – GREENER, GOODER PASTURES

REVIEW

So we are currently learning about the good life that God has planned for our lives. And no, I'm not just talking about the sweet by and by when everything will be perfect and we are living in the glories of heaven. While that is certainly going to be by far the best life we could possibly live, the Lord has promised us a little bit of this heaven on earth too.

Now there are many Scriptures that back this up too. We've looked at a lot of them. But one thing that proves the life God desires to give us is found in all of the examples of men and women of God who walked with God in the Bible.

Just look at the lives of the likes of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, etc. etc. etc. We see through so many of these examples blessing after blessing! But even when people hear about these examples, they will cite other examples like Job and try to use him as an example of someone who would prove the contrary.

But what these fail to understand about Job is that while just a casual observance of his Book might lead us to believe that his life was not so good, really, all of his sufferings happened during the span of about just nine months. So while that was certainly a really bad year, Scriptures teach us that he lived for about 210 years total, and those other 209-plus years were most certainly a reflection of this good life we are talking about!

You see, in the first chapter we are told about how much the LORD had blessed Job – **Job 1:1-3** say, *"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East."* This blessedness describes his life up until he was about 70 years old.

So just think about that – if you or I just lived a 70-year life, and for 69 of those years, this is what our life looked like – even though we had one year (just one) where the trials of Job happened to us – would you consider that a bad life or a good life? That ain't so bad of a life, is it?

Well, that was not even Job's entire life – The Bible then tells us that he lived for another 140 years (which was another two 70-year periods of time, mind you – showing us how that when the LORD blessed him with twice as much as he had before, this included even the years he lived on this planet too).

So then, like I just said, God blessed Job with double what He had during the first third of his life: In the last chapter of the Book of Job, we are told – *"Now the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning;*

for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-Happuch. In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days." (Job 42:12-17)

Church, this is easily a life that people would kill for! This is what any sane person would call a "Good Life," and it's the life of Job!

And as we are studying, this is the life described to us in the 23rd Psalm!

So, last week, we finished the first "verse" of David's Psalm 23 as we spent a couple of weeks on the phrase – "The Lord is my Shepherd" – and then last week, we covered the phrase – "I shall not want."

So we learned that what David was basically saying here is, "Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want!" In other words, both the LORD being David's Shepherd and David knowing that the LORD is His Shepherd was the factor in him being able to make such a concrete statement like this.

But one of our main takeaways last week was that when David said, "I shall not want," he was not saying, "Thou shalt not want." In other words, there are a lot of Christians who don't believe that we ever need to desire or want things. And while we certainly are forbidden to be covetous, that does not mean that we are in error if we are believing God for the things He wants us to have. Therefore, we don't need to spiritualize God's promises like this, but read it as David intended – "I will not lack, I shall not have a need, I won't be without, etc.," referring to natural, physical things.

So we looked at several verses that back this truth up – that our Good Shepherd never wants His sheep lacking but wants to not only meet every need but to give us the desires of our heart.

Saints, we shall not lack when we have made the Lord our Shepherd! Amen!

GOOD, GREEN PASTURES

Now notice in verse 2 that David goes on to say that the Lord your Shepherd, who will not let you lack, also "makes me to lie down in green pastures ..."

First of all, let's talk about the phrase "green pastures":

The word "pastures" simply describes the abode or habitation of shepherds. So this describes the type of places that the Lord, our Shepherd, leads us unto. But like a good shepherd, God is not leading us to barren and fruitless places. He is looking to bring us into places that are described here as "green" ...

You see, the phrase "green pastures" literally describes "pastures of grass" because the Hebrew word translated "green" here is referring to "grass" itself rather than the color of it.

In fact, this word translated "green" describes not just any, old grass, but it describes new, fresh, tender grass. Yes, this Hebrew word for "green" describes "new grass," not mature grass ready for mowing, but grass that is just sprouting and young. It was the word that was used in the beginning when God created

the grass brought forth from the earth (See Genesis 1:11-12). So the specific type of pastures that David was alluding to here are pastures of newer, fresh, tender grass – the kind of grass that is the most desirable for sheep to both eat and to lie down on.

So what does this teach us? It teaches us that the Lord does not tend towards giving us just old, used up stuff. No, our Good Shepherd doesn't just lead us into a life of second-rate, hand-me-down, old & washed-up kind of things. This specific type of grass that He is said to make us lie down on is the best kind of grass – grass that is new, grass that is fresh, grass that is tender. It's the best quality! Yes, the Lord desires to give us a new life, a new beginning, a fresh start. He makes all things new and He has made all things good. Amen!

And we are obviously not just talking about "grass" here. While grass is certainly a very important part of the sheep's life, the kind of "green" that is important to us as humans is the kind that is goes in your purse or wallet.

Therefore, the "pastures" that the Lord our Shepherd is going to lead us into are the best places that money can buy. Yes, the best homes, the best workplaces, the best churches – the best, the best, the best! And these "pastures" are "greener" pastures – meaning, they are places filled with the newest & "goodest" things. This is our God, church! This is what the good life can look like!

We see a similar terminology and a much more descriptive use of this phrase "He makes me lie down in green pastures" used in **Ezekiel 34:14-15** when the Lord said, *"I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God."*

So, we see the Lord again acting as the Shepherd of His people, feeding them in *good* pasture and making them lie down in this rich pasture. Notice the word "good" being used here too. In these verses, those "green pastures" that our Good Shepherd is leading us lie down on are *good* pastures, good and green pastures!

But I want you to notice where these "good pastures" are located, according to Ezekiel's prophecy – They are on the high mountains of Israel! Hallelujah!

You see, when we refer to "mountains," it is usually in the context of the mountains being circumstances that are obstacles/hindrances that we desire to see removed and cast into the sea. In fact, this is definitely a very biblical way of describing "mountains." But this isn't the only way "mountains" are described in Scripture. Sometimes ascending the mountain of the Lord and other mountaintop experiences are used to describe the place where God's people are meant to dwell.

So if you combine these two biblical analogies, what we can see is that the good life involves living on top of the circumstances, not under them. It's like the old phrase when one is describing how they are doing – "Well, *under the circumstances* ..." Church, we don't have to be "under the circumstances," hoping that God will remove them! No, we are meant to live on top of those mountains, not under them!

Yes, increase and elevation are involved in this good life! This is the life that the Lord desires to make us lie down in. However, don't get the wrong impression by this terminology (i.e. to lie down). According to Ezekiel's prophecy (and many other Scriptures), the Lord's will is to take us higher, not lower; to be exalted, not debased! Amen!

THE FREE WILL OF THE SHEEP

Now the phrase “*He makes me to lie down*” might give one the wrong impression about how the Lord operates. The Lord is not in the business of “making” us do anything.

In fact, in several other translations, this phrase is worded that the Lord, our Shepherd, “lets” us lie down in green pastures. To me, this is much more accurate in the context of the entire Holy Scriptures because of the crystal-clear truth that the Lord gives free will to mankind.

This is why the ungodly make ignorant statements like, “I just don’t believe that a loving God would ever send someone to hell.” Well, that’s true to a certain extent; He doesn’t send people to hell. But they choose their own condemnation. They choose serving a sin & satan over receiving the Lord’s free gift of salvation. Therefore, they receive the same lot as their master, the devil. It is really that simple.

So, no, the Lord is not making us do anything. Always remember: when God is involved, free will is involved. Therefore, He did not make us choose Jesus as our Lord and Savior, nor will He make us choose this good life that we are talking about either. We all are living our lives on various levels of God’s good, acceptable and perfect will for us.

So, we should never say things like, “Why is God blessing them more than me?” or “Why do I struggle with this and not them?” That is implying that God alone is the variable and we do not have a say in the quality of life that we are experiencing. Saints, the truth is that we are as close to God right now (i.e. experiencing His presence etc.) as we want to be – and this also applies to other areas of our life. We can choose (the good) life!

As the Lord put before His people in **Deuteronomy 30:19**, “*I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live,*” He gave them the option of choosing what they wanted – life or death, blessing or cursing. Church, living the good life is our choice, not God’s!

So let me quickly give you the “way” in which we choose life (i.e. the good life): First of all, notice how the LORD – after telling them that He is setting before them life and death / blessing and cursing – tells them to “choose life.” You see, it’s as if He wanted to give them the right answer – “choose life.”

So I take this as the LORD giving us free will, but then, in His big heart of love for us, makes it crystal clear what the answer is! And in the context of Deuteronomy 30:19, it’s all about walking in God’s ways, keeping His commandments, following His statutes, and abiding by His judgments (See verse 16). Do you see a theme here? It’s about doing things God’s way and following after the things that He has clearly laid out in His Word. That’s the key to “choosing life.”

So, you see, the Lord our Shepherd doesn’t drive us. If He did, He would have been called the “Good Cowboy” instead of Jesus calling Himself the Good Shepherd. You see, a cowboy drives his herd. He ropes and ties them. However, a shepherd leads, guides and calls his sheep. Therefore, the Lord is not in the business of making us doing anything. No, He calls us. He bids us to come follow Him. He gently leads us in the way we should go. And that way is on pastures of tender grass. Amen.

LAYING DOWN IN PEACE

Now let's look at this phrase — “Me makes me to lie down”:

This entire phrase actually comes from one Hebrew word, the word *rabats*. This word literally means “to stretch oneself out or lie stretched out.” Thus, the reason that this word is translated “to couch” in a couple of places. Therefore, this word describes what we would call, “reclining.”

So today, we might translate this first half of Psalm 23:2 like so — “He helps me to take a load off and to rest & relax.” Therefore, this good life that God has prepared for us to walk in isn't just a life of hard work, labor, and toil. No, it also involves restful & relaxing times too!

You see, while we certainly are to be “working” for the Lord in our Christian walk, it is not the Lord's will that any part of it feel like “work.” Yes, if we are not joyfully serving the Lord, then we are not serving the Lord the way He intended for us to. When we are living the Christian life correctly, we will live a life that is full of rest & relaxation. It is only when we try to live the Christian life in the arm of the flesh that we become stressed-out and lose our peace.

Yeah sure, it is not always pleasant putting the flesh under, and sure, it is not always easy to go through the various trials we fall into. But if everything always seems arduous and an uphill battle, then we are likely missing it in some way.

Therefore, to lie down in green pastures describes our Good Shepherd leading us, His sheep, to places of comfort, rest and relaxation—like a spiritual couch or recliner. Amen!

Now it has been said that sheep will not lay down unless they are truly at peace, and oftentimes this peace comes as a result of them knowing that their shepherd was present with them. So it is with us — for David said in **Psalm 4:8**, “*I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell safely.*”

Solomon said that when one embraces a life of walking in the LORD's wisdom, the following is the result — “*When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet*” (**Proverbs 3:24**).

Here, both David & his son, Solomon, give us a big key to sleeping well — it is learning to lie down *in peace*. And the major key to doing that is found in the second half of Psalm 4:8: “for (or, because) You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell safely.”

So, us entering into that peace referred to here is determined by us believing in our hearts that our Lord will cause us to “dwell safely.” In other words, He will cause us to live a life that is guarded, protected and kept by Himself alone.

You see, the “you alone” is an important part of this phrase too. It denotes that the Lord Himself is the One who we see as being able to make us live safely (not with any help of our own, I might add). And did you know what worry and anxiety really are? They are us not believing in our hearts that it is God alone who will keep us safe and sound. Amen?

Church, when we get the revelation that our God is indeed with us and He alone is the One that will protect and defend us, we will indeed be at peace — particularly when we see that the objects of those fears that come up are the Lord's problem and not just ours.

IT IS NOT OUR FIGHT

It is important for us to realize that the battles we face are not just our battles; they are His battles.

Do you remember the story of King Jehoshaphat in Second Chronicles chapter 20 – how God began to speak to them and said, *“Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.”* (Second Chronicles 20:15)

What an awesome statement this is that the Holy Spirit made at the end of verse 15 – “The battle is not yours, but God’s!” We would do good to continuously reflect on this truth in order to remind us that the battle is not ours, but the battle truly is God’s.

You see, this powerful phrase has a whole range of applications to our lives:

These “ites” that Jehoshaphat had coming up against him were types and shadows of the kingdom of darkness that we wrestle against under our New Covenant. And these demonic forces manifest themselves in many different ways. Their effects range from the more obvious demonic devices such as depression, oppression, sickness, and poverty to the subtler areas of darkness such as bitterness, envy, strife, and selfishness. So, when it is written that the battle is not ours but the Lord’s, this applies to any of these different “ites” that come against us today.

For example, when we see the enemy working to destroy our marriages – trying to generate strife and bring division between us and our spouses – we should remember that the battle is not ours, but God’s. Sure, in the middle of these difficult situations, the enemy will feed us the lie that our marriage is hopeless and that our spouse will never change. Sure, he will try and deceive us into thinking that we better defend ourselves lest we be taken advantage of.

But the truth is that the battle for our marriage is not ours, it is God’s. God is able to create hope where there seems to be hopelessness. God is able to bring change when change seems impossible. God is able to heal, restore, and even prosper our relationship with our spouse no matter how discouraging our situation seems. It is His battle, and He is resolved to fight it for us. Hallelujah!

But do you know what happens when we see the challenges we encounter as our battles? Our pride will cause us to attempt to take things into our own hands. For example, when we have lost loved ones, we feel such an urgency to see them come into the light that we allow that fear of their present course to drive us. When this happens, we will take every opportunity that we get to hammer them with the truth and witness to them. While our motives are good, we need to also understand that the battle for our loved-one’s salvation is not ours; it is also the Lord’s battle.

We need to understand that we cannot make anybody see the light; only God can because no one comes to Jesus unless the Holy Spirit draws them (John 6:44 & 16:8). Therefore, we should just rest in Him – trusting that He is fighting that battle and drawing them to Himself – while at the same time being open to share the truth with them as the Lord opens up the opportunities.

You see, understanding that each and every battle we encounter in our life is the Lord’s battle and not our own is such an important part of the Christian life. It is a principle that we see all throughout God’s

Word and He desires us to understand: We are victorious only by the grace of God and not by any works that we have done. We are saved by the grace of God. We are healed by the grace of God. We are prosperous by the grace of God. The proud are the ones who are self-sufficient. But we need to walk in humility and realize that God's grace is Him fighting all our battles for us, and it has been His plan for mankind since Adam. The awesome thing is the battle is the Lord's, but the victory is ours. He does all the fighting and we get all the blessings, when we let Him fight the battle by not fighting it ourselves.

Therefore, every battle we find ourselves in - whether it be over our ministries, over our physical health, over our finances, over our families, or over our own souls - God has said that all of these are His battles and, therefore, should not concern us in the least. When we get bills that are a challenge to our budget, we need to recognize them as God's battle. Hold them up and say, "God, you've got mail." Thank you, Jesus!

THE ROOT OF FEARING DEFEAT

Let's now draw our attention to the phrase that the Holy Spirit included before He said that the battle is not ours, but God's. Again, He said, *"Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's."*

By including that word "for" before this phrase we have just covered, God is telling us why we are not to be afraid or dismayed when these "ites" come against us. So, what was the reason that He gave them not to fear? It was because it was not even their battle; it was God's. He told them not to be afraid or dismayed because the battle was not even theirs to fight.

You see, if the battle was ours then we would have every reason to be afraid because we know that we have limitations. We know that there are many problems that we will encounter that are beyond our control. So, if these battles were indeed ours, we most definitely would have every reason to be afraid.

But let me ask you a question: Are you ever afraid of God losing any of His battles? Of course, you are not. So, can you guess the only reason why we ever get afraid when alarming situations enter into our life? It is because we see them as our battles. Yes, the only reason we become dismayed is because we incorrectly see these huge and insurmountable problems as our battles, and not God's. Therefore, the very root of the fear of defeat is not being fully persuaded that the battles we encounter are the Lord's battles and not ours. That is the gospel truth, my friends!

Sure, if we were asked if we believed that the problems we have were our battles we would deny it, but the evidence of our faith is in our actions. If we are in fear, it is because we do not truly believe God will fight that battle for us. If we are afraid and worried it is for one of two reasons: Either we do not believe God can handle it or we do not believe He will handle it. And usually our deficiency is not in believing that God has the power or ability to do what He wants to. What we are generally deficient in is not in believing that God wants to. In other words, most believers are not convinced that God is willing and resolved to fight all of their battles for them.

But the truth is God has said that every battle we find ourselves in that was instigated by the enemy is not our battle; they are His battles. Therefore, if we saw our problems in this light, we would be full of peace in the midst of the storm because we know that God is more than able to take care of these situations.

Church, knowing these things is exactly what caused Daniel to lie down in that den of lions and get a good night's sleep. It was that he knew that His Good Shepherd was with him and would shut those lion's mouths for him. Glory!

So, my point is: it is both the known presence of the Good Shepherd and knowing that He is resolved to care for His sheep that creates the peace among the flock. Yes, He is there to defend us from the turbulence that arises within the flock and to keep us from the predators that come in from outside of the flock. Amen.

Verily, verily, I say unto you – The Lord our Shepherd makes us to lie down in peace in pastures of tender, fresh grass! This is a big part of the good life!