

“Psalm 23”

Psalm 23

Pastor James York

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen

We laugh, rejoice and celebrate because Jesus is our risen savior, providing everything we need, protecting us, guiding us, restoring our soul, laughing with us and transforming each of us into an eternal, glorious, spectacular person.

God is beyond time. Often scripture describes the mystery of “already” and “not yet.” David sang. **Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all that I need.”** We are able to join David in singing this verse when we imagine our soul restored while we are broken, struggling in a broken world. In the previous psalm David grieves, laments, wails, cries and complains for 31 verses. David describes himself as a worm scorned and despised by all. David says my life is poured out like water, all my bones out of joint, my heart is like melting wax, my strength is like sunbaked clay, my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth, lying in dust I have been left for dead and on and on for 31 verses. David also wrote psalms about the struggle to make loving choices, the debilitating guilt of bad decisions, the heartache of a lost friendship, the terror of running from a pursuing army, the struggle for health, how his sins haunted him, the anguish of family strife, the despair of a messed up country. In the midst of these overwhelming needs David sang. **Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all that I need.”** While David’s soul was shattered, he sang **Psalm 23:3 “God restores my soul.”** While David was alone, afraid, worried he sang **Psalm 23:6 “Surely goodness and grace shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”**

Reading the psalms reveals the tension in David’s life, the “already” and “not yet”. Love is already supreme. Love is already eternal. Love is already transforming every fear, hate and worry into goodness. Love is already fulfilling every need. Love is already bringing abundant life from death. Love is already healing every disease. Love is already mending every brokenness. Love is already bringing everyone together in harmony. Love is already recovering every loss. And the “not yet”, coronavirus, unemployment, strife, division etc. Our lives and the world are squeaking in arduous pain. Anne Lamott says, “Grace is spiritual WD-40. The movement of grace is what changes us, heals us and our world. Against all odds, you will get your sense of humor about yourself back. Laughter really is carbonated holiness.”

We may be unsure about what tomorrow brings, what will be opened and closed, if we have a job, can we buy food, will we enjoy good health, can we gather with friends, can we play, vacation, can we celebrate birthdays, graduations and weddings. The short-term future is unsure, it is the “not yet”. The long-term future is sure, certain, absolute, all of us, all of the cosmos, perfected, glorified, united, fully alive forever. When everything was falling apart David sang. **Psalm 23 KJV “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”**

Hope is present in God being with us as our living shepherd safely guiding us through terrify valleys to abundant paradises. Joseph Prince wrote. “When we are fearful and worried all the time, we are living as if we don't believe that we have a strong and able Shepherd who is tenderhearted toward us, who only leads us to good places, who protects us and lovingly watches over us.”

Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need.” God is constantly loving you, enfolding you with joy, carrying you to glorious life. God will give you all you need. You will be whole and complete. God, your shepherd, loves you, cherishes you, delights in you. God is smiling upon you for you are God’s masterpiece.

Psalm 23:2-3 “God lets me rest in green meadows; God leads me beside the waters of rest. God restores my soul. You are true to your name, and you lead me along the right paths.” God propels us to live fully alive. Our seeking, thinking feeling, is guided by God. The spiral keeps turning to make us whole, to perfect and glorify us. God transforms, restores, renews, invigorates us. We came into being by the breadth of God. The Holy Spirit sustains our life through every breath. God is breathing passion into us, a thirst for living water, an appetite for the bread of life, a yearning for love, a journey for completeness, a quest for joy. Enjoy the green pasture moments in your life. Play, laugh, roll in the grass. God restores your soul no part of you is ever lost, discard or broken beyond repair. All of our souls are continually being restored by God. Often God restores us through our joys. Savor creation, music, art, food, people, reading, sports, work, hobbies, laughter.

A restored soul loves. In physics there is the principle of the conservation of matter. Nothing disappears; it only changes form. Similarly, in the spiritual realm, nothing is ever lost, all that is not love will change form to love, all that is broken in our soul will be restored. God is making all that is unclean, clean. Everyone one of your dark, fearful, hateful, judging thoughts God is changing to love. Love endures forever. God is restoring our souls.

Psalm 23:4 “Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid for you, God, are close beside me. Your staff protects and comforts me.” God is sovereign and will get you through everything. God frees us from all that diminishes life to a way of being where all nourishes life. Resurrection life triumphs over every form of death, dissolving our fear, enabling us to navigate through every form of darkness to light. No matter your predicament, crisis, heartache God will get you through to abundant life. God prods, pushes, pulls and carries you through your difficult times. We are never abandoned by God. We will go through treacherous valleys and agonizing dark times. It will feel like you are alone, yet God is with you, carrying you to the spectacular mountain top meadows.

Psalm 23:5 “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you fill my cup until it overflows.” God is a gracious host. God delights in serving you. In David’s time the obligations of hospitality included protecting a guest from enemies. God is aware of your enemies and renders them harmless. Sometimes the enemy is yourself. Whatever your enemy, whether a disease, crisis, anxiety, guilt, overthinking or broken relationships. God is constantly preparing a feast for you where relationships are more than healed, their deepened and abundant with delights. However, you are numb, grey, dreary God is serving you robust feelings, vibrant color, and vigorous energy. You will feast on grace, kindness, compassion, peace, rest, joy and deep breaths of the Holy Spirit. God abundantly showers you with blessings, more that you can ever savor for your cup overflows. You are loved more than you deserve. You are loved more than you need and want. You are anointed with joy. You are honored, dignified and proclaimed to be a beloved heir of God.

Psalm 23:6 “Surely God’s goodness and grace will pursue me all the days of my life and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.” God and God’s love, joy, grace and peace are with you, in you, surrounding you, now and forever. Take a deep breath, a step back, a bird’s eye view and you will perceive God loving. There is nothing you can do to break your relationship with God. Nothing can ever separate you from God’s love. There are seasons when we might not sense God’s love, yet God is always loving you. God will never leave or forsake you.

Goodness pursues you. All the order, wonder, grandeur of creation pursues you to bring life to every moment. Grace pursues you. You will mess up, make mistakes, fail miserably, get sick, burnout, become anxious, get depressed and sin. Grace pursues you. God forgives every sin and mistake. God is already with you to pick you up after every failure. God wipes away every tear, redeems every thought and heals every wound. God is putting a new and right spirit within you. God offers an eternity of moments, all of them a fresh start. Immediate and unconditional forgiveness is pursuing you. Goodness, unfailing love, mercy, grace, beauty, peace, joy is pursuing you. God is constantly loving you to perfect and complete you all the days of your life. Every day God has, is and will forever give you life.

Retracing is the process of going back into your symptoms and conditions, and also into your fears and anger, handing your burdens to God to heal and transform. One might say it is reframing yourself. Retracing is reading, pondering, feeling, living the 23rd psalm over and over so you can forgive yourself, let go, let come and become fully alive. Retracing is embracing the “already” in the midst of our “not yet” reality.

Psalm 23 MSG “God, my shepherd! I don’t need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I’m not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd’s crook makes me feel secure. You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I’m back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.”

Let go of your daily “not yet” and join David in singing, dancing, feasting upon the “already”, your restored soul, green meadows, nourishing waters, banquets, overflowing joys, in harmony with all people in God’s mansion. Amen.