

JUST CHECKING IN #145 April 2014 “... and ...forever” Psalm 23

All the days of my life.... and forever....

Having just returned from two weeks in Israel, the images of the land and sheep and shepherds remain etched in my mind. I never knew how much desert and high, barren mountains dominated the landscape. I, like you, had seen many pictures of Israel in years past in Bible Atlases, Picture Bibles, and on the internet. But it never struck me as when seeing it in person. The desolation of so much of the land makes the reality of the necessity of a shepherd for a sheep’s survival unmistakable.

Psalm 23 A Sheep’s Boast

Years ago I heard of a book on Psalm 23 entitled “A Sheep’s Boast.” I haven’t been able to locate the original source of the title, but have often repeated it when introducing Psalm 23. It fits it so perfectly. The speaker puts himself forth as a sheep with the perfect Shepherd, Jehovah Raah.

Why are there sheep? God created them!

Why are there still sheep? Shepherds!

There are no passenger pigeons any longer. There are no Mastodons any longer. Zoologists tell us there are thousands of species of animals that are no longer in existence due to ecological change, over hunting, disease, and more. Why are there still sheep? Not because they are smart, strong, naturally resilient, aggressive, or fast. There is but one reason sheep still exist: Shepherds!

The 23rd Psalm reminds us that if you’ve got the right shepherd, you’ve got it made. And when Jehovah is your Shepherd, you will lack for nothing, now, all the days of your life, or forever.

DECLARATION

The Psalm opens with the sheep’s boast; a bold declaration of unhesitating confidence in The Shepherd, Jehovah.

23:1 Jehovah is my Shepherd, I shall lack for nothing.

PROOF

The rest of the Psalm is proof positive of the bold assertion of complete provision by Jehovah Raah.

23:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

The Shepherd makes me lie down at rest in fields of abundance. The food is so prolific that I must lie down on the dinner table, as it were. He leads me beside quiet waters, not beside raging torrents where one misstep would mean death. He provides in careful abundance in a land where such abundance is rare indeed.



23:3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Like sheep we wander, but He restores. The heart wanders before the feet do. When my soul wanders, He convicts, brings to repentance, and restores my fellowship, my peace, my joy and my hope deep within my soul. He guides me in the right paths. How blessed are we that our Shepherd never leaves us or sends us away. He leads us, therefore His presence is permanent. Where ever this Shepherd is taking me, He is leading and guiding me, and therefore ever present with me. The paths He chooses, though high and hard, or deep or dark, are right paths. The paths are chosen for the sake of His own good Name! This is the absolute guarantee that we can follow with confidence wherever He leads, for His name is at stake in the outcome. What a supreme level of confidence that gives us. He leads us in the right paths for the sake of the glory of His Name.



23: 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Notice that what follows “paths of righteousness” is “the valley of the shadow of death.” If the Shepherd leads me through this dark valley, it is the right path for me and it is for His name’s sake that He leads me there. He is still leading. It is still the right path. I need fear no evil will befall me, for my ever vigilant and ever present Shepherd is right beside me. I in this dark valley I need direction and protection. My Shepherd has both in His hands. His rod defends me, His staff directs me. Let come what may, my Shepherd is prepared to defend and direct me safely through.



23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

No matter the danger, no matter the foe, our Shepherd is sovereignly unconcerned. He prepares the table for our full satisfaction though surrounded by the enemy. He anoints us as kings and priests with full access and a shared throne with Him. The measure of His provision is an overflowing cup of abundance. Our Shepherd is not moderate in His supply! Notice the number of times “abundant” or “abounding” is used to describe His attributes and provisions in scripture.

23:6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

As we look back over the long miles that stretch over the right paths down which He has led us we see the tracks of goodness and lovingkindness all along the way. The Shepherd leads and the goodness follows. The Shepherd leads and lovingkindness follows. And the tracks are uninterrupted as they are found every day, all

the day, all the days of our lives. The confidence remains that they will keep on following us all the days of my life...and....

Let this surprizingly placed conjunctive touch you deeply. We might have expected the verse to have ended with a period: "all the days of my life." Yet, in the sentence after "all the days of my life" we do not find a period, we find an "and.... Forever." All the days of my life and... forever. You see, the earthly Shepherd leaves when either the sheep dies or the shepherd dies; but not this Shepherd. He never dies, ever lives, and leads beyond death into "forever!" And His sheep never die, since He has provided not only abundant present life but also an endless life of abundance in His house forever.

I told my dear wife that if I leave for glory before her, she can put the dates of my birth and death on the little headstone followed by the word "and" 1954-20__ "and" Ps 23:6 For the two dates define the duration of the journey, "and" defines the duration of the destination.... And.... Forever!

How blessed we are to have the Shepherd tell us the destination as He leads us down the right paths for His name's sake ever leading, never leaving, always protecting, direction, providing!

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead us Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1836.

Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use Thy folds prepare.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast bought us, Thine we are.

We are Thine, Thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
Keep Thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.

Thou hast promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
Thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! We will early turn to Thee.

Early let us seek Thy favor, early let us do Thy will;
Blessèd Lord and only Savior, with Thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessèd Jesus, blessèd Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.

For Futher study

1. Word study on "abounding" and "abundant" in Psalms and New Testament Epistles
2. Compare Psalm 23 with John 10 for the Shepherd analogies
3. Check out Shepherd titles in John 10:11, Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4
Good in His death, Great in His resurrection, Chief in His coming again

"O Shepherd, You alone are my hope and my help. All is lost without You. All is well with You. I bless You that You are my Shepherd and all that you do for me is based on the honor of Your own holy Name. F or

Your Name sake, O Lord, lead me and guide me safely home. You are my Lamb, my Shepherd, my King and my God. Lead on, O Shepherd, and I will follow. In Thy Name alone I pray, Jehovah Raah, AMEN."

Remember, you are very special to us and we pray for you continually.

Living with leaving in view.... Jn 9:4 *Ron & Val*

Seeing The Invisible, embracing The Unapproachable, declaring The Unexplainable, changed by The Immutable, running after The Irresistible with inexhaustible joy in our inexpressible sorrows, spending our time on eternity, owning nothing yet possessing everything that matters and lasts. We are Pilgrims in Paradox. Welcome to THE JOURNEY.