

St. Matthew AME Church
Orange, New Jersey 07050

Women's Bible Study Fellowship
Saturday, March 11, 2023

Fall and Winter Series: "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD. "
"The Lord is my shepherd. "Psalm 23:1a

Session VI: "Blessings, Security and Eternity"

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23:6 KJV

Review of Session I: "Relationship and Resources "

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. " Psalm 23:1

- The beautiful relationship given to us repeatedly in Scripture between God and us are those of a father to his children and a shepherd to his sheep. David, the author of Psalm 23 knew from firsthand experience that the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of shepherd who owned it. David spoke with a strong sense of pride and devotion and admiration. David was proclaiming in these few words ("The Lord is my shepherd ") that he was grateful for a loving and caring God.
- The main concept of " I lack nothing " or " I shall not want " is that of not lacking-no deficient-improper care or management. A second emphasis is the idea of being utterly content in the Good Shepherd's care and management.

Review of Session II: "Rest and Refreshment "

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

- The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup, it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless they are free from fear, free from friction, free from torment and free from hunger.
- In our lives we will also face great challenges, stubborn roadblocks, disagreeable experiences and even some petty frustrations. All of these may cause us to lose our peace. In the midst of these uncomfortable times, the gracious Holy Spirit brings quietness, serenity, strength and calmness in the face of negativity. Psalm 62:1
- Just as a shepherd leads his sheep to a place of peace and calmness, Our Good Shepherd takes over in His wondrous way to bring a sense of quiet contentment over us. Then we are able to lie down in peace and rest.

Review of Session III: "Restoration and Righteousness "

"He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake. "Psalm 23:3

- When sheep are "cast down " and immobilized, the shepherd, (who is the attentive owner) is quick and ready to come to the rescue of the helpless sheep. The shepherd is ever patient, tender and helpful.
- Similarly, in the Christian life there is an exciting and comforting parallel. Even Christians become cast down, dejected, downhearted and despondent. Our Good Shepherd comes quietly, gently reassuringly to us, no matter when or where we may be cast down.
- When we follow God's path, we will never go wrong. His path is always right. If God fails to care and lead us, He fails to be THE Good Shepherd. He must care for us, because HIS name demands it.

Review of Session IV: "God and I"

"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 staff they comfort me. " Psalm 23:4

- The psalmist said: "Yea though I walk, " here is a calm deliberate step, which would not suggest fear. David did not think of wandering in the valley.
- In order for the sheep to get to the mountaintop, they had to go through valleys (where they would encounter harsh weather and danger from wild animals)
- As believers, we must understand that we cannot get to the mountaintop (good times) unless we go through the valleys of life. The challenges we face in the valley will help to strengthen our faith, change our outlook on life and develop a closer relationship with God and hopefully with others.
- God's rod and staff will comfort us through His Gracious Holy Spirit by:
 1. drawing us into an intimate relationship with God (rod and staff)
 2. showing God's power to overcome the enemy (rod)
 3. correcting and disciplining us(rod)
 4. showing patience, compassion and kindness(staff)

Review of Session V: "Preparation and Protection"

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. " Psalm 23:5

- The high mountain country of the summer ranges is called the tablelands. The shepherd will make numerous trips to prepare the tableland for his sheep. He would spend time eliminating poisonous weeds. Though tedious and tiring with all of the bending, it was a case of " preparing the table in the presence of my enemies.
- The parallel, in the Christian life is that Christ, our Great Good Shepherd has Himself already gone before us into every situation that we may encounter. He has known our sufferings, experienced our sorrows and endured our struggles in this life. He was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. The Christian walk can thus become a mountaintop experience-a tableland trip simply because we are in the care and control of Christ, who has been all over this territory (circumstances of life) before us and prepared the "table" for us in plain view of our enemies who would demoralize us if they could.
- Even when the sheep are on the mountaintop(tableland) they will experience some irritations. They will have to deal with parasites, different annoying flies and scab (irritating and highly contagious disease.)
- The most effective antidote for these irritants is to apply oil to their head. What an incredible transformation this would make among the sheep. Once the oil had been applied to the sheep's head, there is an immediate change in behavior.
- In the Christian life, most of our contamination, that would defile and disease us spiritually comes through our minds. The only practical path to attaining a mind free of the world's contamination is to be conscious daily, hourly of the purging presence of God's Holy Spirit, applying Him to our mind.

Session VI. "Blessings, Security and Eternity"

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23:6

- Through the study of this Psalm, continuous emphasis has been put upon the care exercised by the attentive shepherd. It has been stressed how essential to the welfare of the sheep is the shepherd's diligent effort and labor. All the benefits enjoyed by a flock under skilled and loving management have been drawn in bold lines.
- Now all this is summed up here by the psalmist in one brave but simple statement: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. "
- The sheep with such a shepherd knows of a surety that his is a privileged position. No matter what comes at least and always he can be perfectly sure that goodness and mercy will be in the picture. He reassures himself that he is ever under sound, sympathetic, intelligent ownership. Goodness and mercy will be the treatment he receives from the master's expert loving hands.

• Not only is this a bold statement, but it is somewhat of a boast, an exclamation of implicit confidence in the one who controls his destiny.

WHAT ABOUT US!

- How many Christians actually feel this way about Christ? How many of us are truly concerned that no matter what occurs in our lives we are being followed by goodness and mercy? Of course, it is very simple to speak this way when things are going well.
 - If your health is excellent, your income is flourishing, your family is well and your friends are fond of you, it is not hard to say, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."
 - But what about when one's body breaks down? What do you say when you stand by helpless and watch a loved one die under great pain? What is your reaction when your job folds up and there is no money to meet bills? What happens when your child is caught running with the wrong crowd? These are the sort of times that test a person's confidence in the care of "Our Good Shepherd."
 - When your little world is falling apart and your dreams, ambitions and hopes crumble into ruins, can you honestly declare, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,"
 - With our limited understanding as a finite human being, we cannot always comprehend His management which is always executed in infinite wisdom.
- With our natural tendencies to fear, worry and ask " why," it is not always easy to assume that God really did know what He was doing with us.
- For the one who is truly in Christ's care, no difficulty can arise, no dilemma emerges, no disaster can descend on us without eventual good coming out of the chaos. This is to see the goodness and mercy of God in our lives. This has really become the great foundation of our faith and confidence in God.

"THE OUTPOURING OF GOODNESS AND MERCY"

- All the care, all the work, all the alert watchfulness, all the skill, all the concern, all the self-sacrifice are born of His love- the love of One who loves His sheep, loves His work, loves His role as the GOOD SHEPHERD.
- The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us." I John 3:16
 - We love Him because He first loved us. His goodness and mercy and compassion to us are new every day.
 - Our serenity has as its basis an implicit, unshakable reliance on God's ability to do the right thing in any given situation. Continually there flows out to us God's goodness and His mercy.
 - This outflow of goodness and mercy for us should be passed on through us to benefit others. This goodness and mercy should not stop and become stagnate in our lives. Just as God's goodness and mercy flow to us all the days of our lives, so goodness and mercy should follow us, should be left behind us as a legacy to others wherever we may go.

WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES THESE QUESTIONS.

- Is my life a pleasure to people or a pain?
- Do I leave behind forgiveness or bitterness?
 - Do I leave behind joy or frustration?
 - Do I leave behind love or hate?
- Do I see others with the compassion of Christ or with a critical eye?

THIS IS DEEP!

Are we willing to overlook faults and weaknesses in others and extend forgiveness as God has forgiven us our failings?

- The only real practical measure of our appreciation for the goodness and mercy of God to us is the extent to which we are in turn, prepare to show goodness and mercy to others.

- If we are unable to forgive and extend friendships to those who have fallen, then it is quite certain we know little or nothing in a practical sense of Christ's forgiveness and mercy to us.
- We who know firsthand about the goodness and mercy of God in our lives will be warm and affectionate with goodness and mercy to others.

"I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER"

- This Psalm opened with the proud, joyous statement, "The Lord is my shepherd." Now it closes with the equally positive affirmation, "And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."
- Here the sheep is so satisfied with its lot in life, so fully content with the care it receives, so much "at home" with the shepherd that there is not a shred of desire for a change.
- On the shepherd's side there has developed a great devotion and affection to his flock.
- The word "house" used here in the Psalm has a wider meaning than most people could attach to it. Normally we speak of the house of the Lord as the sanctuary or church or meeting place of God's people. In one sense David may have had this in mind. And of course, it is pleasant to think that one would always delight in the Lord's house.
- But it must be kept in mind always that the psalmist, writing from the standpoint of a sheep is reflecting on and recounting the full round of the year's activities for the flock.
- The shepherd has taken the sheep from the green pastures and still waters of the home ranch, up through the mountain passes onto the high tablelands of the summer range. Fall has come with its storms and rain and sleet that drive the sheep down the foothills and back to the home ranch for the quiet winter. During all seasons of the year, with their hazards, dangers, disturbances, it is the shepherd's alertness, care, and energetic management that have brought the sheep through satisfactorily.
- It is with a feeling of contentment that this statement, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever," is made.
- Actually, what is referred to by "house" is the family or household or flock of the shepherd. The sheep is so deeply satisfied with the flock to which it belongs, with the ownership of this particular shepherd, that it has no wish to change whatever.
 - As Christians, we should be much like the sheep in this psalm. We should be proud to belong to Christ. We should boast to others how good our SHEPHERD is. How glad we should look back and recall all the amazing ways in which God has provided for our welfare. We should delight to describe the hard experiences through which He has brought us. And we should be eager and quick to tell of our confidence in Christ. We should be bold to state fearlessly that we are so glad we are His. By the contentment and serenity of our lives we should show what a distinct advantage is to be a member of His "household" of His flock.
- There is one other beautiful and final sense in which the psalmist was speaking as a sheep. It is brought out in the Amplified Old Testament where the meaning of this last phrase is, "I will dwell in the presence of the Lord forever." This is the most significant sentiment that David had in his heart as he ended this psalm of praise.
- Not only do we get the idea of an ever-present Shepherd on the scene, but also the concept that the sheep wants to be in full view of his owner at all times.
- This theme has run all through our studies of the 23rd Psalm. It is the alertness, the awareness, the diligence of a never-tiring master which alone assures the sheep of excellent care. And from the sheep's standpoint, it is knowing that the shepherd is there; it is the constant awareness of his presence nearby that automatically eliminates most of the difficulties and dangers while at the same time providing a sense of security and serenity.
- It is the sheep owner's presence that guarantees there will be no lack of any kind; that there will be abundant green pastures; that there will be still clean waters; that there will be new paths into fresh fields; that there will be safe summers on the high tablelands; that there will be freedom from fear; that there will be antidotes for disease and parasites; that there will be quietness and contentment.

- In our Christian lives and experience, precisely the same idea and principle apply. For when all is said and done on the subject of a successful Christian walk, it can be summed up in one sentence, "Live ever aware of God's presence."
- There is the "inner" consciousness, which can be very distinct and very real of Christ's presence in our lives, made evident by His Holy Spirit within. It is He who speaks to us in distinct and definite ways. He takes care of us with love and concern because we belong to Him. And this will continue through eternity. What an assurance! "I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD!