

Welcome and Introduction

Good morning! I hope you've had a good week. This morning we want to celebrate God's goodness and mercy to us! He is our good shepherd. We will be meditating on Psalm 23 and we will be singing and praising Jesus with some songs.

Praise God, we've managed to get the furniture we need before the shops were closed for lockdown! We are now planning to move to the Manse next Friday.

This is our first online service and we hope you will be able to access it on the YouTube Buckminster Road Baptist Church channel.

Just click on the link: <https://youtu.be/DveaLt8bo1E> or copy and paste it to your browser. My prayer is that this lockdown won't extend any longer than a month and that soon we will be able to meet again face to face, especially to start our Christmas celebrations during the month of December. Let us keep praying for those who are sick and vulnerable in our congregation. May our God keep us all safe.

Open Prayer

Dear Father, we exalt your name among the nations! You are our hope and you comfort all who call on your name. This morning we want to fix our eyes on Jesus, the rock of our salvation and we want to declare your goodness. Come with your presence and speak to us through the songs and the preaching of your word. Lord we offer our service to you this morning as a sacrifice of praise to your name. Be welcome in this place and in the homes of everyone that will be watching or reading this service today. May we all be filled with your Holy Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Song 1 – Hope of the Nations (Brian Doerksen)

<https://youtu.be/37NYEIo7sEI> Click on the link or copy and paste to your browser in order to hear and follow the song on YouTube.

*Jesus, hope of the nations
Jesus, comfort for all who mourn
You are the source of Heaven's hope on earth*

*Jesus, light in the darkness
Jesus, truth in each circumstance
You are the source of Heaven's light on earth*

*In history You lived and died
You broke the chains, You rose to life*

*You are the hope living in us
You are the rock in whom we trust
You are the light shining for all the world to see
You rose from the dead conquering fear
Our Prince of Peace drawing us near
Jesus our hope, living for all who will receive*

Lord, we believe
Lord, we believe
Lord, we believe

Song 2 – How Great Thou Art (Stuart K. Hine 1953)

<https://youtu.be/Cc0QVWzCv9k> Click on the link or copy and paste to your browser in order to hear and follow the song on YouTube.

*O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the works Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.*

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.*

*And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.*

*When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,
And then proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!"*

Preaching and Teaching – Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

**2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.**

**3 He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.**

**4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

**5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.**

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.**

Introduction

This Psalm is more than to remember God's promises and goodness to us. It is not only a declaration of what the Good Shepherd does for his sheep, but it is a testimony of a life experience with God. This is a Psalm of King David and Psalm 23 is one of the most known passages in the Bible. It's a Hebrew poem and David speaks about his spiritual journey. His way of meeting with God and being founded by God. As God can't be defined but can be perceived. We can perceive God in our day to day life and in this poem King David is telling us about his walk with God. Imagine if David was here... What would you ask him? I would ask him to talk to me about God. Who is God for you? How do you perceive and experience God? What role does God play in your life? How is your relationship with God? I believe David would look to me and say:

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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*5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*

*6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.*

We can read this Psalm in a modern way with our western minds trying to divide the words into concepts and doctrines and place numbers on them. We could come up with a list of blessings and promises the good shepherd does for us. We could make a list of blessings and number them one by one. Blessing 1, Blessing 2..., but we can't forget we are reading a poem from a man who lived in history and he is sharing with us the way he perceived and experienced God in his life journey. If we read Psalm 23, with this background in mind, we may arrive at another place. Which is not a simple place where God makes promises for you. In this Psalm, there is at least three different scenarios: First - The image of the shepherd with his sheep in green pastures (David at the field taking care of his father's herd); Second - The image of the valley of the shadow of the death (a place of fear and darkness) and Third - The Image of the house of the Lord (where he is anointed and there is banquet in the presence of his enemies). By reading Psalm 23 and making a parallel with King David's life we can see how he learns about God and how his perception and experiences with God changes from a simple faith to a more complex and mature faith and knowledge of God.

I – At the Green Pastures

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”

Taking care of a herd sheep in the middle east is very different than taking care of a herd of sheep here in the UK. A shepherd there would need to go out in front of his herd searching for those green pastures. It wasn't an easy task to find the green pastures to feed the sheep. It also wasn't easy to find fresh water, he would need to look carefully in order to find the right path and guide the sheep. ***“He leads me in the paths of***

righteousness for His name's sake." So, he could give his herd the refreshment, security and provision they needed. This is the first experience of King David with God. The first moment he talks about a God who places him in a colourful and beautiful paradise. God, not only provides for his physical needs, but his spiritual needs too. **"He restores my soul;"** The sheep would sometimes get dirty in the mud, and the mud would stick onto their wool, then the mud would dry up because of the heat of the sun. This dry mud then starts to oppress the sheep tighter and tighter to the point that the sheep cannot breathe properly. The good shepherd then takes the sheep, covered in dry mud, to the still waters, not only for them to have water to drink, but to clean themselves by taking the mud away, so that the sheep can breathe again. **"He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul;"** David would say: "I remembered being a shepherd myself and the way I took care of my father's herd. I protected them and I knew the way through the desert in order to bring my sheep to the oasis. I knew the seasons and in each season I learnt how to lead the sheep into green pastures and still waters and I did this for a good part of my life (when I was young). And this is exactly what God does for me, he is the Good Shepherd and he cares for me." However, this Psalm takes a rapid and strong shift from David's peaceful and colourful world to...

II – At the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Where and when was the valley of the shadow of death for David? Was it the day when a lion and a bear came to attack his father's sheep and he was able to kill them both with his slingshot? **34 "But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God." I Samuel 17:34-36** No, I don't think so. I believe David is speaking about another moment in his life. When he was young, in his father's house, his world was in place. He would say... "I knew what I needed to do every morning with my father's sheep. My life was peaceful and everything was great. But it came a day when I was in front of a giant and I killed the giant and instead of going back home I was taken to Jerusalem in the king's car. The people were praising king Saul, but when they saw me walking beside the king, they started shouting my name louder. I became a celebrity in Jerusalem and I went to live in the king's palace. I used to play my harp in the fields. Now I had to play for an insane king, who was furious and jealous of me. I remember a prophet came to my father's house and he anointed me with oil and told me I was going to be a king, however I started to fear for my life. One day the king threw a spear at me and he almost killed me. The king's son, Jonathan was my best friend and he told me about his father's plan to kill me. I had no other choice then to run for my life and so I ran and I went to live up in caves and it was dark. There was a promise of death over my head. Suddenly, my whole world was turned upside down and that sense of security, peace and rest I had in God, was all gone now. I found myself surrounded by all those who were fugitives, distressed, in debt or discontented in that cave. Wherever we went, people feared us as everyone knew we were the rebels and the king wanted to kill me. I started to see things differently, firstly I couldn't see God at all. He disappeared from my sight and I couldn't understand what was going on. From a shepherd in the field, being anointed as king, applauded by the whole of Jerusalem to suddenly now, a fugitive, with a life sentence over my head. I am living at the valley of the shadow of death and it is one of the worst places to live

because death is knocking at the door, it is surrounding me. Living with the feeling that I may die at any moment.” Think about a lady that has lost her mother due to breast cancer and time to time she needs to do a checkup because the risk runs in the family. This woman lives in the valley of the shadow of death; Think about a young child in Yemen fighting to survive over a small piece of bread. This child and his parents live in the valley of the shadow of death; Think about thousands of people around the world right now in intensive care on a bed in the hospital with Covid-19 fighting for breath in their lungs. These people are living in the valley of the shadow of death. In this pandemic, many of us are living in the valley of the shadow of death and this is a terrible place to be. Where is that oasis? Where are those green pastures? Why do I wake up at night with my heart beating fast? Why can't I sleep well during the night? How did it get this dark? This is the valley of the shadow of death. Where is the God who takes me to calm waters? Some people are living in the valley of the shadow of death because death took someone close to them, a dearly loved one that has passed away. Sometimes people who are mourning can stay in this place for a long time 5, 10, 15, 20 years. Some may think if they come out of mourning, they will betray the memories of their loved ones so they stay there. The good news is you don't need to stay in the valley of the shadow of death! The key word of this verse is “walk” = to walk through. **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”**. You are just passing through and you are walking and you won't stay there if you keep walking. The shadow only lasts for a while because the sun is going to shine again. **“...weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”**

III – At the Father's House Forever

“When I arrived there, there was a banquet waiting for me, a feast in the presence of my enemies. My head was anointed with oil and I am now wearing a crown over my head. I am no longer a fugitive in the caves, but I am now sitting on the throne and I have access to the temple. I am in the presence of God and my cup overflows. The valley of the shadow of death is gone and I lived in this place for a while, but there was a day that God took hold of me and he brought me out of darkness. I am not that young lad who thought the world would always be a sea of roses, I've grown up and matured.” I don't know what point of your life you are in now. Many of us may be in the valley of the shadow of death with this pandemic. Don't be afraid! Be courageous! Don't lose heart! Have faith! It may all seem dark, but God is with us. So if we could ask David about his experiences with God perhaps, he would say that the most important expression in his Psalm is that... **“For You are with me;...** “I've got provision because you are with me; I've been refreshed in my soul because you are with me; I am free from the fear of death because you are with me; I am eating a banquet at your house because you are with me; I am living under your goodness and mercy because you are with me.” God is with us my dear friends...The Lord is with you! In each and every circumstance you may find yourself in.

I hope that soon we will be celebrating Christmas. Take heart His name is Emmanuel, God is with us! There is oil over your head, stand up and continue walking and serving God with all your heart. **“You anoint my head with oil;”** David is now saying “God poured oil over my head and he anointed me and he gave me a mission. I have a purpose for my life, I am the King now and I have a God given mission. I have an important and sacred job to do for God. Now my experience of God is different because I am no longer worried whether I am in a palace or in a green field or in a desert running

from my enemies. I know that wherever I am and whatever the circumstance is, I don't need to fear because God is with me and his mercy and goodness is running after me." ***"Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord."*** We can compare David's life with Jesus's life on earth, Jesus had his enemies, they put a crown of thorns on his head, they rejected and crucified him. Jesus also went through the valley of the shadow of death. **9 *"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*** God prepared a table for Jesus in the presence of his enemies and he overcome death and Jesus promised us that one day we will be with him at his table.

Conclusion

At the green pastures we can celebrate and enjoy God's guidance, blessings and provision for our lives. The good shepherd loves and cares for us. At the valley of shadow of death our faith won't be shaken because we know God is with us. His role is not to prevent us from going through the valley, but His role is to be there with us so we won't be stuck there. God is with us in the valley in order for us to find our way out. We walk through it without fear because the good shepherd is with us. And at the house of the Lord, we can dwell forever, we have a purpose in this world and we can't stay at the oasis for long, as if there wasn't a world to be cared for and we can't stay at the valley of the shadow of death because there is an oil poured over our heads. God has anointed us to preach good news to the poor... ***"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.."*** *Isiah 61:1*

Response Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

We thank you for all the encouragement and hope we found in your word this morning. Thank you for the life of King David and this beautiful poem he left written for us. Lord we thank you for being a good shepherd to us and for all your provision and blessings. Help us to walk through the pain and difficult times knowing that you are with us. Help us not to fear the valley of the shadow of death. We also thank you for your presence and your anointing over our lives. God, may you use each one of us powerfully as your instruments to bring the good news to all. Lord we pray for salvation and for your Holy Spirit to fill our lives so that our cups overflow. May your goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives. How we love to live in your house Lord. Bless your church spread around the world in this difficult season we pray. In Jesus holy name. Amen

Song 3 – Goodness of God – Bethel Music

https://youtu.be/70fZGfg6_28 - Click on the link or copy and paste to your browser in order to hear and follow the song on YouTube.

*I love You, Lord
Oh Your mercy never fails me
All my days, I've been held in Your hands
From the moment that I wake up*

*Until I lay my head
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

*Cause all my life You have been faithful
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God*

*I love Your voice
You have led me through the fire
And in darkest night You are close like no other
I've known You as a Father
I've known You as a Friend
And I have lived in the goodness of God, yeah*

*And all my life You have been faithful, ohh
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God, yeah*

*'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now
I give You everything*

Final Prayer and Apostolic Blessings

Let's finish our service this morning by saying together:

"May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God, and The fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever more amen." 2 Corinthians 13:14

Have a blessed week and see you next Sunday!