Looking Back - Psalm 23

The Joy Of the Lord Is Your Strength!

Hardly anything beats a "radiant face"

INTRO:

1. Good morning friends!
2. JINGLE MART
   a. Go Shopping (List on the qr code - or the card to hand out!)
   b. Go Serving! (Dec 12 for the big sale!)
3. Speaking of Christmas!! WISDOM FOR THE HOLIDAYS!
   a. It's the time we navigate all the things - family, time away - let's let Proverbs give us some wisdom

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

[1] The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [2] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. [3] He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. [4] Even 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 overflows. [6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

1. Something happens as you get older.
2. When you're young, you're pretty impressed with yourself.
   a. You've got plans, dreams, ambitions.
   b. You're going to change the world.
   c. And somewhere in your twenties, you're fairly certain you know more than your parents.
3. *Then life happens.*
   a. You raise a few kids.
   b. You make a few mistakes.
   c. You walk through a few valleys.

    d. And somewhere along the way, you discover that maybe you weren't quite as smart as you thought you were.
4. And God was a whole lot more gracious than you realized.
5. Here's what I'm discovering:
6. ***The older I get, the less impressed I am with me and the more amazed I am with God.***
7. I think that's what we discover in Psalm 23.
8. We don't know exactly when David wrote this psalm, but I like to imagine him as an older man, looking back over his life.
9. *There were the really great parts!!*
    a. A shepherd boy who became a king.
    b. A giant-killer. A warrior. A man after God's own heart.
10. *But there were some other chapters, too.*
    a. Bathsheba. Uriah.
    b. A family that fell apart.
    c. A son who rebelled against him.
11. *David had some days worth celebrating and some days he probably wished he could forget.*
12. And yet, when he sits down to describe his life in Psalm 23, he doesn't mention a single accomplishment.
13. Look at who does all the work in this psalm.
    a. He leads me. He restores me. He prepares a table. He anoints my head.
14. It's as if David is saying, "If you want to understand my life, don't look at what I did. Look at what God did."
15. *"The LORD is my shepherd."*
    a. David knew sheep. He knew they were dependent creatures that needed somebody to lead them, protect them, and provide for them.
16. And David says, *"That's me.*"
17. **"The Lord is my shepherd" is a statement about God. But it's also a confession about me: I'm a sheep.**
18. So what does David see when he looks back over his life?
19. 4 things:
    a. **God *leads***
    b. **God is *present*.**

c. **God *provides*.**

d. **God *pursues*.**

1. He Leads Us

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." (vv. 1–3)

1. When David looks back over his life, he recognizes that there was somebody leading him.
2. And I wonder how many of us, if we really stopped and thought about it, would recognize the same thing.
    a. Think about the people God brought into your life.
    b. The opportunities you didn't see coming.
    c. The doors that closed that you were so disappointed about, only to discover later that God was protecting you.
3. *Sometimes you can see God's leadership clearly in the moment.*
    a. But often, you see it best in the rearview mirror.
4. So how does God lead us?
5. **He leads us to places of rest.**
6. "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."
7. Why still waters?
    a. Because sheep are easily frightened.
    b. Fun fact - sheep wont drink from water that is moving quickly...
    c. A good shepherd knows that, so he leads them somewhere they can drink without being afraid.
8. Don't miss the tenderness of that picture.
9. *The Shepherd doesn't just know what the sheep need. He knows what the sheep can handle.*
10. And notice that he *makes* them lie down.
11. Apparently, sheep have something in common with a lot of us. Sometimes we don't know when to stop.
    a. We keep working.

b. Keep worrying.
c. Keep trying to figure everything out.

12. And sometimes God, in his kindness, leads us into a season where we have to slow down.
13. Some of you have been frustrated because God isn't moving you forward fast enough.
14. Have you ever considered that maybe the Shepherd is trying to get you to lie down?
15. *Maybe the season you're trying so hard to get out of is the very season God is using to restore you.*
16. **He leads us to places of restoration.**
17. David says, "He restores my soul."
18. Here's the deal - I believe this is David looking back on his life with ALL of his sin and shortcomings.
19. *David is saying that there is ALWAYS forgiveness found in God - but God is very interested in us GROWING in these seasons.*
20. Sometimes God is more concerned about what's happening *in you* than what's happening *through you*.
    a. We want God to fix our circumstances. God wants to heal our hearts.
    b. We want God to change the people around us. God wants to change something in us.
21. And sometimes the most important thing the Shepherd does isn't take us quickly out of a situation - *It's bring us back to a place of close relationship with him.*
22. Then David says, "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."
23. **He leads us in the right direction.**
24. Now, notice that David doesn't say the easiest path, the shortest path, or the most comfortable path.
25. *He says the right path.*
26. And there's a difference.
    a. A good shepherd knows the terrain better than the sheep.
    b. He knows where the dangers are.
    c. He knows where the next pasture is.
    d. He knows which paths look promising but lead nowhere.
27. The sheep doesn't know any of that.
28. The sheep just needs to know the shepherd.
29. And I think that's where some of us struggle.

30. We want God to show us the whole plan. We want to know why we're here, what's coming next, and how it's all going to work out.
31. This reminds us of our first sermon in the series - David was never given the whole plan - AND THAT'S OK - it's the way God works....
32. **You don't have to know the whole path when you know the Shepherd.**
33. Some of you are in a season right now where you don't understand what God is doing.
    a. Maybe you're wondering why he closed a door.
    b. Why he hasn't answered a prayer.
    c. Why he's taking you in a direction you never would have chosen.
34. Can I encourage you?
35. **You don't have to understand everything God is doing to trust that he knows what he's doing.**
36. And David tells us why we can trust him: "for his name's sake."
37. **God's leadership is rooted in his character.**
    a. He's not a careless shepherd.
    b. He's not figuring things out as he goes.
    c. He's not going to lead you somewhere and then forget about you.
38. **He's good.**
39. Here's the big question:
    a. Are you willing to follow the Shepherd even when he leads you somewhere you wouldn't have chosen?
40. *Because it's one thing to follow Jesus when he's leading you beside still waters.*
41. *It's another thing to follow him when the path leads somewhere dark.*
42. And that's exactly where David takes us next.

2. He Is Present With Us

1. *"Even 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."* (v. 4)
2. Here's something I wish every Christian understood early in their walk with Jesus:
3. *Following Jesus doesn't mean you won't walk through dark valleys.*
4. **Sometimes the path of righteousness leads right through one.**

5. And if your understanding of Christianity is that following Jesus guarantees an easy life, you're going to have a crisis of faith when life gets hard.
6. Because you're going to assume that something went wrong.
7. But David doesn't say, *"The Lord is my shepherd, so I'll never experience trouble."*
8. He says, "When trouble comes, you are with me."
9. And I love what happens in this verse.
10. Up until now, David has been talking *about* God.
    a. He leads me. He restores me.
11. But when David gets into the valley, he starts talking *to* God.
    a. "You are with me."
12. **In the valley, God goes from someone you talk about to someone you talk to.**
13. Some of the sweetest people I've ever known have walked through some of the deepest valleys.
14. And what makes them remarkable isn't that they have answers for everything that happened to them.
15. It's that somewhere in the middle of their pain, they discovered a closeness with Jesus that they had never experienced before.
16. SPURGEON - It's in the furnace that all our theological words become real to us...
    a. It's in the valley that we learn how to pray when they didn't have the words.
    b. It's here when learn how to worship when they didn't feel like singing.
    c. It's here that we learn that the presence of God was enough to sustain them when the circumstances of their lives didn't make sense.
17. Maybe that's where you are today.
    a. You're sitting in a doctor's office.
    b. You're grieving somebody you love.
    c. You're watching your marriage struggle or your child wander.
18. And you've been asking God, "Why?"
19. That's an understandable question.
20. But sometimes the most comforting answer God gives us isn't an explanation.
21. It's himself.
22. There was a very interesting study done at the University of Albany...
    a. picture this - a massive, steep hill. 3 people standing in front of it with weighted vests.
    b. Person 1 - nobody next to them - asked to explain how steep it is.

c. Person 2 - a classmate next to them - asked to show how steep it is.
d. Person 3 - a close friend standing next to them - asked to show how steep it is.

23. *Some of you don't need another explanation today.*
24. *You need to know your Father is near.*
25.
26. **Pain is not proof of God's absence.**
27. So here's your assignment this week.
    a. When fear rises, when grief comes in waves, when you don't know what tomorrow holds, pray to remind yourself of four words:
28. *"You are with me."*
29. And if you're walking through a valley right now, let somebody walk with you.
30. Our prayer team would love to pray with you after the service.
31. Sometimes one of the ways the Shepherd reminds us of his presence is through the people he sends to sit beside us.

3. He Is Our Provider

1. *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."* (v. 5)
2. Now notice where David says God prepares his table.
3. *"In the presence of my enemies."*
    a. Not after the battle is over.
    b. Not after the enemies are gone.
    c. Right in the middle of it all.
4. The word "enemies" doesn't just mean people who are out to kill you - it could also be internal enemies or circumstances...
5. Here's what David is saying: **God doesn't wait until your enemies are gone to set the table.**
6. Some of us are waiting for our problems to go away before we can experience the goodness of God.
7. **Even when life is hard, God is still good.**
8. **And even when you're surrounded by trouble, you're still surrounded by His provision.**
9. Some of us are so focused on what God seemingly hasn't fixed that we've stopped noticing what God has provided.

a. The job isn't everything you hoped it would be, but it's providing for your family.
b. The season has been difficult, but God has brought some incredible people alongside you.
c. The prayer hasn't been answered the way you wanted, but somehow you've had the strength to get through another day.

10. I'm not suggesting that every hardship has a silver lining.
11. *I'm saying that even in a difficult season, God's goodness is worth noticing.*
12. And here's what I want you to understand about provision.
13. God's greatest gift to you isn't something you can deposit in a bank account.
14. *It's Jesus.*
15. Romans 8:32 says that if God didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us, how will he not also graciously give us all things with him?
16. *In other words, if you ever wonder whether God has been generous to you, look at the cross.*
17. Now, because of this - David says, "My cup overflows."
18. *And guess what - an overflowing cup is meant to spill.*
    a. Maybe God has provided financially so you can help somebody who's struggling.
    b. Maybe he's brought you through a difficult marriage so you can encourage another couple.
    c. Maybe he's given you years of wisdom so you can invest in a younger believer.
19. Sometimes your greatest pain can be God's greatest platform.
20. What would it look like this week for somebody else to experience the goodness of God because of the way you loved them?

4. He Never Stops Pursuing Us

1. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."*(v. 6)
2. *I think this may be the most beautiful thing David discovered about God.*
3. Because when David looked back over his life, *he didn't just see the moments when he was following God.*
4. **He saw the moments when God was coming after him.**
5. That word "follow" in verse 6 I believe is a little weak in translation...
6. *That work literally means to pursue or chase.*

7. David knew what it meant to be chased.
    a. Saul had hunted him through the wilderness for years.
8. But looking back, David realized *something else had been chasing him the whole time.*
    a. The goodness and mercy of God.
9. And nowhere do we see that more clearly than after David's sin with Bathsheba.
    a. David committed adultery.
    b. He arranged for Uriah to be killed.
    c. And then he tried to cover it all up.
10. But God sent a prophet named Nathan to confront him.
11. Now, at first glance, that doesn't sound like mercy.
12. But think about it.
13. What if God had left David alone?
14. What if God had allowed him to continue living a lie, hardening his heart, and destroying everything around him?
15. One of the greatest expressions of God's mercy was that *he loved David enough to confront him.*
16. And some of you know exactly what that's like.
    a. There was a conversation you didn't want to have.
    b. A sermon you didn't want to hear.
    c. A friend who loved you enough to tell you the truth.
17. And at the time, you thought somebody was getting in your business.
18. Looking back, you realize God was coming after you.
    a. ***Sometimes God's goodness comforts you.***
    b. ***Sometimes God's goodness confronts you.***
19. ***But it always comes from a heart that loves you.***
20. Maybe you've been running from God for a long time.
    a. You grew up in church.
    b. You knew the truth.
    c. But somewhere along the way, you decided you wanted to do life your own way.
21. And now you're wondering if you've gone too far.
22. Listen.

23. The same Jesus who told the story about leaving the ninety-nine to find the one knows exactly where you are.
24. You don't have to get your life cleaned up before you come to him.
25. You come to him because you can't clean up your life without him.
26. So stop running.
27. Contrary to what you thought or were taught growing up...
28. *The Shepherd isn't pursuing you to destroy you.*
29. *He's pursuing you to bring you home.*

Conclusion: The Shepherd Who Became a Lamb

1. A thousand years after David, one of his descendants stood before a crowd and made this extraordinary statement.
2. John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
3. The Shepherd David had been talking about had come in person.
4. And Jesus didn't just come to give us directions for a better life.
5. He came to give his life for ours.
6. Because our greatest problem isn't that we're confused sheep who need better directions.
7. Our greatest problem is that we're sinful sheep who need a Savior.
8. So Jesus went to the cross.
9. He took the punishment we deserved. He died in our place. And three days later, he rose from the grave.
10. And Revelation 7 gives us this beautiful picture of the end of the story.
11. The Lamb at the center of the throne becomes the Shepherd of his people, leading them to springs of living water.
12. ***The Shepherd became a Lamb so the sheep could come home.***
13. And here's the question I want to leave you with today.
    a. Not whether you believe in God.
    b. Not whether you've been to church.
    c. Not whether you know Psalm 23.
14. Can you say what David said?
15. "The LORD is *my* shepherd."
16. *Because knowing about the Shepherd isn't the same thing as belonging to him.*

17. And today, if you've never surrendered your life to Jesus, I'm inviting you to do that.
    a. Repent of your sin.
    b. Put your trust in what Jesus accomplished for you on the cross.
    c. And follow him.
18. And for those of us who already belong to him, here's what I want you to do this week.
19. Read Psalm 23 every morning.
20. Before you ask God for anything, *thank him for something he's already done.*
21. And spend a little time looking back over your life.
22. I think you'll begin to notice some things you missed along the way.
23. And maybe you'll find yourself saying what David discovered and what I'm learning more and more:
24. **The older I get, the less impressed I am with me and the more amazed I am with God.**
25. And that, friends - is the life of King David... Which ultimately points us to Jesus...
26. We believe...

THE GOSPEL: Jesus Christ is the ultimate hope for every person. Though we are all sinful and our sin separates us from God, God made a way for us to be in right relationship with him again. That way is Jesus. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. God promises that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved. This is the good news of the Bible.

PRAYER TEAM

COMMUNION: 1 Corinthians 11

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, [b] "This is my body, which is[c] for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

"May the Lord bless you and protect you;

may the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

may the Lord look with favor on you[b]

and give you peace."'