

Joy's Journey

Psalm 23, Matthew 2:10-11, Luke 2:8-15

1

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.

2

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

3

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

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.

5

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

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.

Joy's Journey

Psalm 23:1-6

Introduction

Section 1: Joy's Foundation (v. 1)

Section 2: Joy's Direction (v. 2-3)

Section 3: Joy's Location (v. 4-5)

Section 4: Joy's Promise (v. 6)

Conclusion

Discussion Questions

1. The world describes joy as "a feeling of great happiness." How would you describe joy after this week's sermon?
2. Explain a season of life when despair darkened your life. What did it feel like? What did you learn?
3. What proof do we have that our eternal joy will be protected and preserved forever? Hint: Read Romans 8:31-39.

One Thing: Every time you come across a worldly promise of joy this week, remind yourself of God's promise of true joy.

Introduction

As we come to the third advent, we come to the intriguing word of Joy.

In the first week of advent, we saw the hope proclaimed from ancient prophets through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and we find encouragement in the fulfillment of Christ's first advent which gives strength to our hope and assurance of His second advent.

With peace, we recognize a world with no peace. War, discontentment, agony, searching, fear. One of the greatest needs in our world today is peace yet no matter how many U.N. resolutions, peace keeping missions and interventions, we fail to find peace.

With each of these previous two advents it has become drastically clear that without Christ being born in a manger, living a sinless life, dying for the atonement of our sins and raising again on the third day, conquering sin and death, there is no hope and there is no peace.

Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, our Shepherd, is the only hope and the only peace.

And so it stands to reason as we come to the third advent, the advent of Joy, that Jesus is just as foundational to Joy as he is in Hope and Peace.

This is why we celebrate the advent of Joy. Without the coming of Christ, there would be no joy.

Image

Why is joy so important?

We get peace. Peace is tangible. Why Joy?

Because whether we know it or not, we are all seeking joy.

“All that we call human history - money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery - is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.”¹ C.S. Lewis

I read a book earlier this week which made the distinction between two types of atheism.

First: Intellectual Atheism.

Intellectual atheism is the denial of God's existence.

However, there is a second type of atheism that is plaguing, not only our world, but our churches as well.

Second: Affectional Atheism.

Affectional atheism is the act of refusing to believe God is the object of our greatest and most enduring joy.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 49.

Very secular economist and author John Fullerton said this:

*"We're all trapped in this system hustling for more money to buy more stuff that we know doesn't give us happiness in order to impress people who we don't really even like... it's kind of insane."*² John Fullerton

As C.S. Lewis so clearly articulated; all throughout history - humans are chasing something.

Transition

In just a moment, we're going to open our Bibles to Psalm 23.

You may be thinking... aren't we supposed to be talking about Jesus? I mean it's advent...

Psalm 23 isn't very advent, is it?

There isn't much Christmas happening in Psalm 23.

And I would say you're right, but there is a lot of joy happening.

As I was trying to decide upon which passage to bring to you this morning on the topic of joy, I couldn't get past the first verse of this familiar Psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ddGv4Ewdsk>

Image

As I look at our world today, I see a world that is increasingly less and less satisfied.

We aren't satisfied with our car, our cell phone, our spouse...
our gender.

We continue to look for something that will make us
happy. Something that will satisfy us...

Care for us and provide us peace, rest, hope or
even joy.

I don't think John Fullerton misrepresents humankind when he says:

"We're all trapped in this system hustling for more money to buy more stuff that we know doesn't give us happiness in order to impress people who we don't really even like... it's kind of insane."

Our world sees the problem, but our world only provides the same solution over and over again that never works... "It's kind of insane."

This is why we celebrate this third week of advent. Because God provides a solution for this longing of our hearts.

This solution isn't wealth, fame or comfort... it's a person and in this person we can be deeply satisfied.

Transition

With this, we come to Psalm 23.

Before we begin, there are two mistakes often made in our minds when we read Psalm 23.

First: Often, we think of Psalm 23 written by a shepherd boy named David who is lounging in a green pasture under a tree gazing out across a herd of sheep who are grazing aimlessly to their heart's content.

While this makes a nice Instagram post, it is far more likely that David wrote this Psalm later in his life. Some even speculate that David wrote this during one of the darkest moments of his life during the rebellion of his son, Absalom.³

Second: We often make the mistake of not coming to this Psalm unless it is a time of loss in our lives or a time of grieving.

Certainly, this Psalm addresses grieving and it gives hope to those facing eternity.

However, this Psalm is for us “all the days of our lives,” not just in death.

This Psalm isn't just cute for children to memorize, this Psalm is for mature Christians who are facing the extreme circumstances of life.

³ 2 Sam. 13-19

Section 1: Joy's Foundation (v. 1)

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

Summary

Joy is finding full satisfaction in God.

Image

God is referred to as shepherd all throughout Scripture. It first begins in Genesis 48:15 when Jacob is blessing Joseph and continues all throughout the Bible.

Jesus Himself is referred to as the shepherd of the people Israel when the Wise Men recite Micah 5:2 to Herod as they searched for young Jesus.

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” Matthew 2:6/Micah 5:2 ESV.

Jesus even refers to Himself as the “Good Shepherd” in John 10:14.

The image of Shepherd carries with it an idea of provision, care, protection and guidance.

The Lord provides and protects.

Application

The natural question then is if the Lord God, the creator of heaven and earth is about our provision and protection, then what else do we need?

This is exactly what David declares.

“I shall not want.”

I shall neither now, nor at any future time want.

This makes me think of one of the most fascinating New Testament promises from Romans 8:28.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” ESV

The Lord God provides Himself as the good Shepherd to those who are called to His name and in that provision there is nothing we need.

True Joy is having ultimate satisfaction...

And ultimate satisfaction only comes through a good shepherd.

But remember, this satisfaction isn't always what we want, but what we need and we will see this on display here in this next section.

Section 2: Joy's Direction (v. 2-3)

2

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

3

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

Summary

If Joy is finding full satisfaction in God then this joy leads us where we must go for His glory.

Image

I love the image here. David says “He makes me lie down.”

You're probably thinking... woah back this bus up. Joy isn't being told what to do.

You're wrong. Joy is being told what to do **providing** the one telling you what to do knows you and is ultimately out for what is best for you.

You see. There is only one person who knows you better than yourself.

No, it's not your mom.

It's the one who made you!

God knows you more intimately than you will ever know yourself. That is why we wear ourselves out trying to find satisfaction in everything surrounding us and only end up wanting more!

God knows the pasture that you need to be in and he will make you lie there. This isn't some contradiction.

Unless for some reason you don't truly trust God as your shepherd and you're still trying to find satisfaction from somewhere else.

I love how Theologian William Plumer puts it.

"The Lord will give them every good thing, "every good cross, every good comfort," every needed chastisement, every needed supply, all timely lessons, all good deliverances."⁴

The shepherd knows what the sheep need and provides.

⁴ Studies in the Book of Psalms, William S Plumer, Pg 309.

Image

Think about these two images. Green pastures and quiet waters.

The world around these sheep is a land of deserts and of drought, which yields nothing to satisfy them.

I didn't understand the importance of these images until I moved out west. In Iowa, there is more lush than we know what to do with.

Pastures are green, no big deal. There is water in nearly every cooley, no big deal.

You drive across Wyoming... and you start to wonder if there will ever be green again.

I can only imagine what the settlers crossing this land on the way to Oregon thought.

I was out by independence rock a few years ago and I remember reading about the amount of contamination and cholera along the trail that was causing people to get sick from drinking the water anywhere close to the trail.

They saw plenty of water but only the pure water was safe to consume. The sad thing is that thousands of travelers died before they knew that the water was no good.

Our world is a barren wasteland of broken promises and shattered dreams. We are surrounded only by disappointment and anguish and danger just like the settlers on the Oregon trail and just like sheep in a desert.

Application

There is but one shepherd whose resources are not of this world and can provide the rest and provision that we desperately need.

“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” Isaiah 40:11

Transition

He makes us lie down in green pastures and he leads us to still waters.

Image

Vs. 3a He restores my soul;

Sheep get sick and sheep stray into danger.

Sheep are fragile and sheep are adventurous... and yes it's okay to say sheep are dumb because they are.

The shepherd is there to draw you back and to heal your sickness.

Application

Even in his perfect protection and provision, we wander. “We like sheep have gone astray...” Is 53:6

The good shepherd brings care for the injured and correction for the one astray.

So we’re talking about the flock of sheep here right? Easy analogy of the body of Christ and Christ being our chief shepherd...

Often, we unintentionally discredit the restorative work of Christ in the life of a seasoned believer.

We like to hear the stories of new believers and see new fruit, but often it is the restoration and correction of a wandering saint that carries the greatest joy.

To quote again the theologian William Plumer.

“The pain of restoration to God often exceed those of a first conversion.”⁵

Truly satisfied sheep find joyful satisfaction in the provision of green pastures and quiet waters as well as the restoration of a shepherd.

⁵ Studies in teh Book of Psalms. William S. Plumber, pg 311.

Image

Vs. 3b He guides me in the paths of
righteousness for His name's sake.

Some translate the words we see here “paths of righteousness” as “straight paths” which could lead to misinterpretation.

Application

Those of you who have been elk hunting know that the straightest path from point A to point B is not always the best path.

We are impatient human beings who always look for the easiest way yet God doesn't promise that. Our satisfaction isn't in the fact that we get from point A to B as quickly and efficiently as possible, but that our shepherd guides us in the best way possible.

For some of you, that is finding satisfaction in God's plan for your life right now even if it isn't what you want to be doing.

Perhaps this job is where he has you because this is the best path forward.

Maybe this issue he is working through in your life is the necessary path of righteousness. It may not be strait, but it is righteous and he is sovereign.

Transition

David culminates this section with the ending phrase “for His name’s sake” as if to remind us that even though it sounds like God is really into us, it is not us who are at the center of the universe.

We find satisfaction in Jesus as our shepherd, not ultimately for our own glory but that Jesus might be glorified through us.

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” John Piper.

Our joy and satisfaction in Christ as shepherd is paramount for our joy.

And in this joy we find direction for His name’s sake.

This is the direction that joy takes us as we follow Christ our Shepherd.

Now, let’s take a look at joy’s location.

Section 3: Joy's Location (v. 4-5)

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.

5

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

Summary

I'm going to contend that joy and satisfaction in our shepherd sustains us through all of life's difficulties.

Image

Listen, I don't know what your valley is and I don't know how long and how deep it is.

I know that some of you, like David as he wrote this, are in a deep valley right now and all you can do is cling to the side as his rod and staff guide and comfort you.

I know this about David's life... It was full of ups and downs.

From being anointed to being hunted.

From being king to losing a child as a result of sin.

From defeating the Philistines to having his son attempt to usurp the throne.

David understood this valley and he knew the only protection was in the shepherd.

Application

One lesson we can take from this is that Jesus is not a fair weather shepherd.

He is in the valley guiding you on. He is there to guide and comfort no matter the circumstances.

Another lesson we can take from this is that our joy and satisfaction in our shepherd can take us to some very uncomfortable places.

Life isn't all green pastures and quiet waters. Often in his path he takes us through places we don't want to go.

Transition

Yet even in these dark valleys where danger lurks he provides rest and rejuvenation.

I don't know about you... but I like food. But if I'm surrounded by enemies on all sides it's not the first thing on my mind.

Yet here in the valley, God is so in control that he invites us to enter his rest and enjoy his meal.

Not only does he provide a meal, but this is a banquet!

The anointing of oil is a symbolic expression made by the host of a banquet that they have great joy in their guests.

The cup of wine at these banquets is designed to be passed around to cheer the guests.

Application

I find it fascinating that God finds joy in you even in your trials.

All through this journey he has never once forsaken us or led us astray. Even in the hardest times he blesses us with rest and finds joy in our company for His name's sake.

So, if our foundation of joy and satisfaction is in our shepherd, that shepherd will lead us where we must go, even in the darkest places he is there to provide joy and comfort...

Now let's look at the final piece of this beautiful passage as we see joy's promise.

Section 4: Joy's Promise (v. 6)

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.

Summary

Joy endures through the promise of His salvation.

Image

Notice here that David didn't proclaim that he broke forth from the valley of the shadow of death and found himself free and prosperous.

David's enemies had followed him, perhaps they were even now following him and might follow him again.

But these things did not move him while he knew that goodness and mercy should follow him all the days of his life.

David's hope in his shepherd even went beyond the dark valleys of this life... it extended past this life and into eternity as he considered God's promise of salvation.

Summary

Transition

You're probably thinking, wow that's all great. But what does this have to do with advent.

2,000 years ago "an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds as they watched over their flocks by night and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:8-12

This little baby is the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world and this lamb will return.

Revelation 7:17 (ESV)

"For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

That's my shepherd. I wonder... Do you know him?