



Sermon Notes

Term – Spring

Series –

Gathering & Date – 10 and 5, 18th March 2018

Title – The Lord's My Shepherd

Preacher – Paul Sankey

Reading – Psalm 23 and Matthew 27:

Main message of this talk in one sentence – Faithful discipleship takes us through tough places as well as good ones: God can be trusted to bless us and others through us whatever the terrain.

Main points –

Jesus' pain at Gethsemane at the prospect of crucifixion – a journey into dark places, what Psalm 23 calls 'the valley of the shadow of death', putting his Father's will first.

What enabled him to do this?

A relationship with his Father and a mind formed by (Old Testament) scripture. Note the roles of the Psalms in this whole section.

A look at Psalm 23:

The predominant image is of shepherd leading the sheep through different places.

1. Green Pastures and Quiet Waters

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 (1:1-3)

The dry landscape of Israel and the importance of water to give life.

Green pastures are the place of well-being marked by the presence of God.

2. The Valley of the Shadow of Death

A graphic description of a frightening place, and one the 'paths of righteousness' go through.

But knowing the shepherd's presence the sheep fears no evil.

The shepherd is described as 'he' in the green pastures but 'you' in the valley of the shadow of death. This is very personal.

3. The House of the Lord

'And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever'.

Not where you would expect a sheep to be.

The Temple was the meeting place of God and his people. What the Temple was for the OT people, Christ is for us.

No matter where we are – whether in the green pastures of the valley of the shadow of death – we are also in a sense in the House of the Lord. And that our destiny – to be in his presence.

4. Goodness and Mercy Follow

The sheep follow the shepherd. But 'goodness and mercy' follow the sheep. (The word translated 'mercy' means unconditional covenant love.)

'Follows' is better translated 'pursues': it won't let us go.

Our faithful following, whether in the green pastures or the darker places, brings blessing in its wake.

For further thought and prayer –

1. How does the image of sheep following the shepherd help us understand our calling as disciples?
2. Does 'following' describe your approach to the Christian life?
3. What do think 'still waters' and 'green pastures' represent?
4. What does the 'valley of the shadow of death' suggest to you?
5. Which best describes where you are now?
6. Why does the Psalm refer to God as 'he' (in relation to the green pastures) and then switch to 'you' (in relation to the valley of the shadow of death)?
7. What has your experience of God been during tough times?
8. What does it mean to dwell in the House of the Lord (a) now and (b) for ever?
9. Does that describe where you are?
10. In what way does goodness and mercy (God's faithful covenant love) pursue us?
11. What can you do to know God's presence better.

People experiencing green pastures might want to give thanks and pray for others having a hard time.

People experiencing the valley of the shadow of death might ask for a sense of God's presence and direction and ask others to pray for them.

Reflect on Jesus being prepared to walk the valley of the shadow of death with us and for us.