

July 25 2010 Psalm 23

HE IS LORD

I was listening to a Christian radio station the other morning where they play lots of old gospel songs. Some I knew, and some I didn't. One caught my ear as it sang about a church where the people came to worship and pray, pray, pray, because they knew God answers prayer. They shout, shout, shout amen while the pastor is preaching, saying 'right on preacher, preach on, preach on.' Then sing, sing, sing praising God for his might acts amongst them and the blessings they received. Why they even sang how Miss Betty would get up and dance up and down the aisle with lifted her hands praising God at that old country Missionary Baptist Church. I kind of chuckled as I pictured this lady with her fancy hat, in high heels dancing in the aisles clapping and raising her hands to Jesus. I pictured the whole congregation shouting, lifting their hands, doing a little dance of their own in the pew, you know like when we sang the chorus for VBS, you know, "Jump, jump, jump, shake, shake, shake, roof, roof, roof" or something like that. The song said when the people entered that church they felt the presence of the Lord. They felt God's power when they prayed knowing he heard their prayers. They felt God's anointing when the preacher preached lifting high God's name and sharing the truth and teaching them about salvation and spiritual growth and how much God loved them, and how they could trust in God. When they sang they

lifted their voices to God in thanksgiving and praise, sometimes with tears in their eyes, for blessings and for being with them. Though the song lasted just a few minutes, and I didn't get all the words, I thought, you know that should be any church. When we enter the sanctuary we should know that God is present. Out of the chaos of the world when we enter the Sanctuary of God something wonderful seems to happen. We find love, acceptance. We find peace, forgiveness, healing, comfort. Sometimes there is laughter, sometimes crying but we know this... God is very much alive and for years he has filled this Sanctuary with his power.

Sometimes in the stillness of a minute we might sing, *“Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place; I can feel his mighty power and his grace. I can hear the brush of angel wings, I see glory on each face; surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.”* Turn to 328 and let's sing that chorus acknowledging we know beyond a shadow of a doubt, God is in this Sanctuary this morning. SING

Once again I believe that song was a God moment, a God thing, and an inspiration for I had decided to preach on part of the 23 Psalm because of the first verse where it says, *“Because the Lord is my Shepherd I have everything I need.”* That's the Living Bible translation.

That verse kept going over and over in my mind, *“Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything that I need.”* Then I thought, what do I need? Then I thought what does the church need? Then I thought, my, what do the people in the

congregation need? We all have different needs at different times. Sometimes we may let others know those needs, but mostly we keep them to ourselves. The key is, to let God know them. “Because the Lord is YOUR Shepherd YOU have everything YOU need.” Sometimes we might think about others who have needs and that’s okay because there are plenty of needs these days. In our own area Kumler always has needs. The food pantry has needs. The Red Cross has needs. These needs are often met through God’s people listening to God telling them to help this organization or that one. If we listen to his Spirit we will know what to do.

People who are unemployed need work. Some, who have lost their benefits because they can’t find work, are looking for help. People are looking for shelter from the heat and all that. It’s tough out there. Some of you might know people who are struggling. Well, if we believe that because the Lord is our shepherd, we have everything we need, what is God saying to us?

Not an easy answer. If you have everything there is no problem. But if you don’t then that’s different. When you have food in the cupboards there is no need to worry. But if you are down to the last thing, and no income, that’s another story. In one of the songs from “Joseph” his brothers are back in Canaan starving to death, while he is in Egypt helping to give out food they had collected for 7 years. His brothers sing about the past few years, but now they have nothing, they were

down to their very last sheep. And of course they had no visitors these days, and, as one of them said, “We would only eat him anyhow.” And just as the song ends a fly or some bug flies by making its noises. One who is singing claps his hands to kill the bug then does something horrible...he was so hungry he ate the bug...and he didn't even share it with his brothers. Then we remember the rest of the story how they all went to Egypt, got fed, and lived happily ever after for at least the next 400 years.

We need to remember a couple of basic things; first, God will not give you more than you can handle, though sometimes we begin to wonder. Second, God will take care of you. An old hymn says, “Be not dismayed, God will take care of you... God will take care of you, through every day; o'er all the way, he will take care of you.” So when that mean old devil gets on your back telling you God doesn't care about you, just brush him off and say, “My God shall supply all my needs.”

Two simple thoughts, but very complex. You see, he truly is Lord and as the shepherd of his sheep he cares for his flock. Think about that for a few moments. What do we know about a shepherd? Well he leads. He goes before the flock to clear the way, check out the ground, watches for dangerous places so that he can lead the sheep around them. He looks for places that are rich with grass or

whatever the sheep will be able to eat. He finds plenty of water so they can not only fill their bellies but be able to wash it down and maybe even cool off.

Think about Jesus as that Shepherd when he said to the people not to be anxious about things. He said don't worry about what you are going to eat, or what you are going to wear. God will take care of you. We are taught to pray, "Give us today our daily bread." Imagine that. We pray for bread when???? Daily. That reminds me when the Hebrew nation was going to the Promised Land and they complained to Moses they had nothing to eat. All the stuff they took when they left in a hurry from Egypt has since been chowed down. So what did they do? They went to Moses to asking what he was going to do about this. After all, though they had it tough in Egypt and had to work their fingers to the bone, at least they had food to eat...not much, mind you, but at least some soup and sandwiches from time to time. Moses realized they needed nourishment so he went to the big Shepherd; he went to God and told him the story of how hungry the people were. What did God do? He took care of their needs. He told Moses every morning he would give them manna and they were to pick enough for that day. When the weekend came, because they weren't to work on the Sabbath they were to pick for two days. But what they picked they needed to eat. No hoarding. The first day following that prayer sure enough this white stuff fell from heaven and the people gathered it and it gave them all nourishment. Some, perhaps like some of us,

thought, you know maybe tomorrow he won't provide, or maybe others will beat me to it, or maybe I'll save a little back for a bed time snack. But you know what, those who did find when they went to get that snack it was bad. You see, God said I'll meet your needs for today. And then they eventually complained that they were tired of the manna and could God provide something else, so God sends them quail, so much quail that they got sick eating it. For 40 years God provided food and water for them.

Don't be anxious about stuff you need, let God know those needs, for you see, God already knows what you really need, dare I say it.... Even before you ask him. Need courage? Ask God. Need strength? Ask God. Need power to forgive someone? Ask God. Need wisdom? Ask God. Need understanding? Ask God. Need healing? Ask God. Need comfort? Ask God. Need a friend? Ask God. Need....you fill in the blank and then ask God.

Let me tell you a story about the time we were in seminary and the car we had was on its last legs. I had just been in a group at the college with a guy who came to seminary who shared how God let him know this was the place for him. He and his family asked for a specific sign from God about a certain type house with this and that. When they came to Wilmore to check it out the first house they looked at was the picture of the one they asked God for. I learned something that day...to be specific at times for what I needed. While there our car was falling

apart and Carole was heading out to meet with her study group. I asked her to pray we could find a car. I said; tell them to pray for a blue one, that way we would know for sure this was the car God had provided for us. That night they prayed for a blue car. The next day Carole went to work and a woman who worked with her asked if she knew of anyone in need of a car. Her dad had passed away and his old car was just sitting there so she wanted to sell it. Carole asked her what color it was and she said, "Blue." Carole asked how much and she said \$700. Carole was excited when she told me that night about the car but we didn't have the money. Confident now that God hears and answers prayer, and this was the car God had provided for us, she went back to her study group and told them we found a blue car but we needed \$700 so they prayed. Just about 5 minutes after she got in the door she got a call from one of the girls she didn't know very well who would be glad to loan us the money. Carole didn't know what to say. She hardly knew this girl. She told her wait a minute, put her hand over the phone and told me what was going on and asked what she should do. I said you asked God for the money and now someone is saying they will loan it to us, do you want to ask God if this is the right \$700?.... She told the woman we would accept. We got the blue car a few days later. God took care of our need, which when I think of it, helped build our faith and our trust. I was in the learning process understanding God can do the impossible if we will only trust him.

David being a shepherd knew what it was like to lead a flock and care for its needs. He knew how to help them as they went through places where the enemy roamed just ready to snatch one from the flock. He knew how to use that rod and staff to keep those wild animals away, or the hook to help pull one to safety after it had wandered off into some place they weren't suppose to be. He knew what it was like to prepare a place a banquet table for his sheep to craze on so that they could rest at night with full stomachs while he was on patrol making sure no one snuck in to cause any danger. He knew what it was like to make sure his flock stayed put in safety while he had to go off and find that one who strayed. He knew what it was like to check his flock for scrapes, cuts, bruises as he anointed them with healing oil. He met their needs as he watched over them.

And as we know, that is what Jesus does. He watches over us. Because the Lord is our shepherd we have everything we need. He is the one who brings us peace. He is the one that binds our wounds. He is the one that leads the way. He is the one who brings comfort to us. He is the one that protects us from all evil. He is the one that prepares a banquet table for us. He is the one that does so much more. He is the one that wraps his arms around us when we think all is lost and comforts us.

Needs! We all have them. God didn't call us to be his children to let us go it on our own. He tells us not only will he take care of our needs but he will also

protect us. The end of that section in Matthew about not being anxious states this, “Don’t worry and say ‘What will we eat? Or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ The people who don’t know God keep trying to get those things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them. *Seek first God’s kingdom and what God wants.* Then all your other needs will be met as well. So don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Pretty good advice to live by. Because the Lord is my shepherd I have everything I need for today. I’ll tell God tomorrow what I need then, and then the next day and the next.

Back to that folksy gospel song. I can still picture that lady dancing in the aisles. I think how conservative we are today afraid to raise our hands in praise, afraid to shout ‘amen’ at times unless the preachers asks for it. You know at one time we were known as the “Shouting Methodists” who danced in the aisles, who sang praises to our God, who said amen and amen as the preacher preached, who believed that God was present when they worshipped and he answered prayers. Maybe we need to recapture that old time religion and that old time faith that said, “He can still calm the storms. He can still open doors. He can still meet my needs.” Prayer, shouting, singing, dancing in the aisles. It’s amazing to me that people, not just young kids, who go to concerts, will raise their hands, sway back and forth to

the music, shout, sing along, and dance where they are as some guy or girl or group sings some secular song. But people come to church to bow their heads in sweet adoration and the next thing you know their eyes are closed and they are drifting off to never-never-land. Have we lost the Spirit? Have we lost what it meant to be “shouting Methodists?” Have we become so conservative that we don’t let the Spirit of God descend upon us and make us whole? I wonder what would happen to the Methodist church or any church or denomination, if we prayed believing God would answer our prayers, shouted amen’s listening to a sermon knowing God was speaking to us through the anointing of the pastor, and sang from the bottom of our hearts those wonderful words of a hymn believing what those words meant. IF that all happened, and IF God’s presence really could be felt I wonder what God would do in the people called United Methodist in the small town of Williamsville, Illinois, located just outside of Springfield? Who knows? I believe God does. And I believe he wants too. After all, He Is Lord!