

The Wealth of the Shepherd

Psalm 23

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Only the rich can give

True or false - Only the rich can give?

The truth is that only those who have can give, and only those who have in abundance can give generously. What we often forget is just how rich we are. All our readings this morning reminds us of the wealth that is ours through Jesus Christ who is our good shepherd.

Our reading from acts today is Peter's response to the rulers of the Jews after healing a lame man. Peter and John were on their way up to the temple for the evening service when they met a lame man. Peter had no money to give him but instead healed him in the name of Jesus. The people were amazed, and Peter used the opportunity to tell them about Jesus who was risen from the dead. The leaders of the Jews were not happy that Peter and John were preaching about Jesus and had them arrested.

In this account Peter and John gave and they gave generously. They saw someone in need, and they had mercy on him. Having received mercy from Christ they shared that mercy with this man in need.

The thing that made Peter and John different from all the other people around them was that even though they had no money they were rich. They were rich in the grace and blessings. They knew that their Good Shepherd was risen from the dead. They were rich in his grace and mercy and eager to share it. Only the rich can give, but you are rich in God's mercy.

Our Psalm for the day, Psalm 23 - reminds us just how rich we truly are.

Psalm 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

I shall not want is an old translation. A better translation is "I shall not lack." I am not missing anything that I need.

Why is it the Psalmist has to say this? If it is true, then why does he need to remind himself? If it is not true, is he trying to convince himself? Sometimes we think that such promises are empty. That is the way the world and our sinful flesh see such promises from God.

The truth is something entirely different. The truth is that we often sit and think about all the things that we don't have and get angry with God that he hasn't given us more.

The Psalmist here wakes up from that sinful nightmare. He looks around and realizes how many blessings he really has. He isn't trying to convince himself he is reminding himself how much he has.

F B Meyer in his book "The shepherd Psalm" puts it this way

"Unbelief puts circumstances between itself and Christ so as not to see him . . . Faith puts Christ between itself and circumstances, so that it cannot see them"

In unbelief all we can see is what we don't have, money, riches, wealth, fame, prosperity etc. Through faith all that we can see is what we do have, the righteousness of God, the mercy of Christ and our Good Shepherd. We have more than we could ever imagine.

Psalm 23:2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

Green pastures and still waters - all earthly comfort

None of us are by any means wealthy by any earthly standards. None of us have vats of gold behind our house. Yet we are wealthy in this that we know our Good Shepherd will provide all that we need for this life. Green pastures and still waters.

Psa 145:15 The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season.

Psa 136:25 Who gives food to all flesh, For His mercy endures forever.

When Dean Marzofka was here for the depression seminar he was talking about a study. This study found that after a certain level more money did not make people happier. At that level people have all that they need. They don't have to worry about paying their mortgage or gas prices. When we have what we need we are at ease.

We have something better. At any level we have a good shepherd who will provide what we need for this life. Jesus doesn't promise to lead us to gold mines. He promises green pastures and still waters.

When your house burns down, the Lord will not leave you homeless. When your cupboards are empty, he will not leave you hungry.

The people of this world find contentment and ease when they feel they have enough money to take care of all their earthly needs. We can have the same contentment no matter what our annual income because we know that we have a Good Shepherd who will always provide all that we need.

We have riches not when we have gold but when we have contentment and confidence in Christ. Because we know that Jesus will always take care of us, we can easily share what we have with those in need.

Psalm 23:3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Restores my soul and paths of righteousness - comfort in time of trouble and guidance for my life

His word gives us comfort and consolation when we are weighed down, and it leads us always in the paths of his righteousness.

It is very clear here that David is not speaking of the law but of the gospel.

For one the law does not comfort. For another the righteousness he speaks of is "for his name's sake."

That is the righteousness that is ours through the name of Jesus. David therefore speaks of the righteousness of Christ which is given to us by his grace.

You are holy before God because Jesus died for your sins.

In this above all else we are rich.

What does Peter say to the lame man? "What I have I give to you."

Peter is not speaking about the power to walk but the grace and mercy of God. Filled with the mercy of God he gives the mercy of God.

We all need to remember this but especially those of us who are married. You cannot give your spouse the righteousness of the law. That is to say you cannot make your spouse do what you think they should do. You are both very poor in that type of righteousness.

You can give the righteousness of Christ. That is, you can give mercy, forgiveness, and grace. In that righteousness you are very rich. That righteousness lifts up the soul. That righteousness is healing ointment in times of suffering.

We are rich in the grace of God.

Psalm 23:4 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.

His rod and staff - protection from death and he pulls me back from temptation

The shepherd staff has two ends, a stick to beat and defend from wolves, and a hook to grab the sheep and pull them back from danger.

David is not so foolish that he thinks that the world will always look like green pastures. He is confident in Jesus' ability to provide all that we need. He warns that there will be times of great darkness. Dark canyons and dangerous precipices must be crossed. Why? The sheep do not know but they are confident that the Shepherd does, and what is more the staff of the sheep is always present to defeat enemies and to pull the sheep back from danger.

In this too we are rich beyond measure that we have God's word and God's law and we have pastors who preach that law. We may not like it when we are told that we are doing something wrong but that is God's word defending us from sin and temptation. We may not like it when God's law or pastors reprimand us, but he is pulling us back from danger.

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.

2 Timothy 1:12 He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Psalm 23 continues from here to speak about how our cup overflows with God's gifts and blessings. While we live in this life goodness follows us everywhere we go. When we die, we dwell in his mansions. In short it describes the overwhelming riches that you have through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:7-8 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

Only the rich have enough to give. You are wealthy beyond the wealth of this world, through Jesus Christ.

Peter and John had this advantage that they could heal the man of his lameness. Yet Peter made it clear to all the people and to the rulers that what he really had to give was not the ability to walk but the riches of God's mercy and love which is given to us in Christ Jesus.

As Jesus once told another lame man, "**Son be of good cheer your sins are forgiven.**"

Since your sins are forgiven, and since you have such a great good shepherd, since you have the wealth of God's riches, since you have received them freely, give freely. **Amen.**