

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Psalm 23 - Aspects of our LORD: The LORD our Provider

Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known psalms of David. His experience of the LORD caused him to write:

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:1-6)

Lord willing, over the next few weeks, we will examine different aspects of the LORD as our Shepherd, namely:

- The LORD our Provider;
- The LORD our Guide;
- The LORD our Keeper; and
- The LORD our Captain.

Today, we will explore this Shepherd as the LORD our Provider. Following this introduction, we will give thought to the expression of the name with that meaning, "Jehovah-Jireh". We shall then examine the ways in which He cares for both our spiritual and physical needs. The spiritual needs are mentioned first because we have to be in a relationship to this Shepherd in order to appreciate all He has supplied, is supplying and will supply for us.

It may well be said that God currently provides for everyone - and this is true. In the book of Acts 17:23-31 we read of Paul revealing the identity of the Greeks' "Unknown God". He describes Him as the Creator who has given life and who sustains life. He is the God in whom all live and move and have their being. So the lives of people depend entirely upon Him whether believer or unbeliever.

It is clear that David knew God in a far more intimate way. No doubt, he had learned of God as the Creator and the Redeemer because he believed the Old Testament scriptures and the prophets of God who lived at that time. David had placed his trust in the living God and had come to know Him as Jehovah. He knew the God who revealed Himself to Moses as *"I AM THAT I AM"* (Exodus 3:14). He knew that He was not only the God of creation; but the God who desired fellowship with those who implicitly trusted in Him. David was so close to Him that He could say: *"The LORD is my Shepherd"* (Psalm 23:1). He was assured that, in His role as a shepherd, the LORD would supply everything he could ever need in life now and evermore. David, once a shepherd himself (1 Samuel 16:11, 17:34), recognised that he was, through faith, one of God's sheep - one of His special people.

The revelation of God in this age of grace is much fuller. His word to us shows that He is a God who truly loves us and wants us to walk with Him as His own children. The Apostle Paul in Romans 8:15-16: states, *"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God..."*

In John 10:11 we find that the Lord Jesus Christ is the *"Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep"*; but in resurrection, He is also called the *"Great Shepherd."* In Hebrews 13:20-21 we read: *"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will..."* Returning to John 10 we find the confirmation of His being the Great Shepherd in John 10:27-28 where He states: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* What blessed assurance this gives to the believer. Once we have repented and placed our trust in the Son of God, we have eternal life.

In a future day, of course, Jesus shall appear as the *"Chief Shepherd"* (see 1 Peter 5:4). He will be the Shepherd-King who will have dominion over all the earth. So as we consider the Lord as our Shepherd, we can see how the role fits God the Son perfectly. Let's look at the fact that Jesus is God.

In John 10:30 Jesus claims to be equal with God by stating that He and the Father are one. This equality is substantiated by Philippians 2:6 where we read: *"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God."* He is also the Source of life itself (John 1:1-5, 10 and Colossians 1:15-18). In Hebrews 1:8, God addresses His Son as *"God."* These and other scriptures confirm the deity of Christ.

Throughout New Testament, we find God is a triune being - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three yet one! In the Old Testament, these are included in the name Jehovah. For example, in Deuteronomy 6:4 we read, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD..."* That is to say, *"Jehovah our Elohim is one Jehovah."* Here Jehovah is singular; "Elohim" is plural; and the word for "one" is compound. So we can see that more than one is included in the name Jehovah. So Christ, the Son of the living God (who is God) (see Matthew 16:16) is none other than Jehovah in the Old Testament. This is confirmed in His names Jesus and Emmanuel. "Jesus" means, *"Jehovah who saves"* (Matthew 1:21) while "Emmanuel" means, *"God with us"* (Matthew 1:23)

We first find the name, "Jehovah-Jireh" in Genesis 22:14 where we read: *"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh: as it is said to this day, in the mount of the LORD it shall be seen."* The name was given following the immediate fulfilment of Abraham's previous statement to Isaac, namely, *"God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering"* (Genesis 22:8). Hence, it is the name given by the Abraham to the place where he had set up an altar to offer up His son, Isaac, as a burnt offering to God.

Many people would despair at the thought of a man slaying the son he loved because God had told him to do so. But Abraham had come to know God well. Already, God had made promises concerning Isaac. Some of these had been fulfilled by this time. Abraham's faith told him the rest would be accomplished too. Hebrews 11:17-19 sheds light on the attitude of Abraham: *"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."* Hence, at the point of slaying his son, Abraham was stopped by the angel of the LORD and God provided a ram for the sacrifice (Genesis 22:9-14). The incident is a picture of death and resurrection.

The whole event portrays a scene that was to come - God would offer up a Lamb (His own Son) as a burnt offering, and more, He would also be a sacrifice for sin. In John 1:29 and John 1:36 John the Baptist identified Jesus as *"the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world"* and then simply as *"the Lamb of God"*. These two aspects of the Lamb revealed Jesus to be the One precious to God and accepted for atonement in the burnt offering and as the Saviour of the world in the sin offering. For there, He was made sin on our behalf so that we might be made righteous before God through Him. Although delivered for our offences, Christ was raised from among the dead for our justification in the sight of a holy God (See Romans 4:24-25).

Along with the name Jehovah-Jireh, came the statement: *"In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen"* (Genesis 22:14). We know from Isaiah 2:3 and Isaiah 66:20 that the Mount of the Lord is Jerusalem. So the clause predicts that an event was yet to be witnessed there and points to the crucifixion of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the age in which we live, we look back to the finished work of Christ. Therefore, God commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30) and put their trust in His Son who has, through His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension made the way of salvation available for all people. The only conditions required to receive this salvation are a sincere agreement with God about our sins (which we judge) and the personal acceptance of Christ as the Son of the living God who loved us and gave Himself for us (see Galatians 2:20). This salvation includes: cleansing from all sin and reconciliation to God; the keeping power of God as we travel through this life; and the final changing of our mortal bodies to be like that of Christ's in a day to come. Hence, we are saved from the penalty of sin when we believe; from the power of sin as we live out our lives here; and, from the presence of sin when we receive our immortal, glorious bodies when Christ comes for us. The Lord provides all this for us by His grace.

When we have trusted in Christ, the verse of Philippians 4:19 becomes active for us: *"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* Although, Paul in the context is thinking of material needs, we could apply it to our spiritual needs also.

It was Mary who, by the Spirit of God, proclaimed: *"My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour!"* (Luke 1:46-47). In the same way, our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour and our souls magnify His name. If we rejoice in God, then we know Him and delight to be in His presence. This emphasises intimacy and worship. If we magnify Him we are making His name great which emphasises praise, and serves as a witness to fellow believers and unbelievers alike.

The Lord has provided us with His word and with the Holy Spirit so we are able to know Him and rejoice in Him. In John 4:23 we read the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Samaritan woman: *“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”* God the Father is seeking true worshippers who will worship Him as He has been revealed by the truth of His word. They will worship Him in spirit, that is, from sincere hearts, in any place and without any accompanying relics or artefacts. We also know that true worship is prompted by the Holy Spirit Himself. In Philippians 3:3 we read: *“For we are the circumcision, which worship God **in the Spirit**, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”* So the Lord has given us the “tools” (for want of a better word) that are necessary to worship Him, namely, the word of truth and the Spirit of God.

The same two “tools” are given to us so that our souls can magnify God as well. Of course, once we have been saved, we are born again as the children of God and are given a new nature as well. It is a nature that desires to please God and to glorify His name. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He revealed God as Father by His words, His works and His walk. He could say to His Father, *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). The Lord has empowered us to do the same!

With continuing reference to the provision for our spirits and souls, the Lord has given gifts to the church. By “church” we mean the whole assembly of believers that has been called out of this world to confess Christ as the Son of the living God and as Saviour. God has given **people** as gifts to the church (Ephesians 4:8); but also given **gifts** to people in the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-31). In this way, He ensures that Christians are led to maturity in the faith; that the ministry is sustained; and that the church is strengthened.

We then come to the ways in which the Lord provides for our bodily needs. In Matthew 6:25 we hear the Lord Jesus saying: *“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”* He then illustrates His provision of these things by speaking of God providing food for the birds; and clothing the lilies of the field. He then states in Matthew 6:33: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* What a promise! Those believers who make the things of God their priority will be provided with food, drink, clothing and we might well add, in line with other scriptures, shelter. These are the basic necessities of life. In our starting passage, Psalm 23, the LORD provides food, drink, protection, rest, restoration and fellowship along with goodness and mercy.

In the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught His disciples, we find petitions in relation to the body, soul and spirit. We can find this in the prayer He taught in Matthew 6:9-13: *“...Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”*

The first part of the prayer involves worship and honour of God and His will (Matthew 6:9-10). This relates to our spirits. The second, *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matthew 6:11) deals with the need of our bodies. The rest relates to the condition of our souls and their desire to magnify His name (Matthew 6:13).

The Bible teaches that our *“bodies are members of Christ”* and *“temples of the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6:13-19). The first shows we should care for our bodies so that we may serve the Lord in the way He has appointed for us. The second shows that we should keep our bodies pure as suitable dwellings for the Spirit of God. So, our spiritual state is dependent to some extent on our physical condition.

There were five of God’s most faithful followers who had a desire to die or wished they had not been born when they were struck by illness, worn out or discouraged. They were Job, Moses, Elijah, Jonah and Jeremiah. Our Shepherd makes us to lie down in green pastures and leads us beside still waters. He knows the importance of physical rest and peace of mind as well as the need for food and drink. Just as a battery needs to be recharged so does the committed servant of the Lord. How often the Lord Jesus told His disciples to: *“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while”* (Mark 6:31). As a dependent man here, Jesus Himself had experienced tiredness, thirst and hunger.

The Bible says, *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Philippians 4:6). As we are His children, God wants us to depend on Him. He wants to hear our prayers just as an earthly father would want to hear the requests made by his children. God is, of course, the perfect Father from whom every good and every perfect gift comes (see James 1:17). He will never fail to provide for our needs. So let’s be assured that He will provide for us according to His purposes.

The provision of the Lord does not exempt us from our responsibility to work with our own hands and provide for our families. The indwelling Spirit of God would prompt us to live a balanced Christian life. When God provided food for the children of Israel in the wilderness, He also gave instruction on how they were responsible to gather it. In other words, those who didn’t obey Him would go hungry. This is supported by the New Testament in 2 Thessalonians 3:10

where Paul said that if a man wouldn't work, he shouldn't eat either. We have seen how God cares for the birds; but they still have to fly out and seek for the food He's provided.

If this is true for our physical needs then it is true for our spiritual needs also. If we want to grow in the faith then we have to attend teaching sessions on His word and more importantly study it for ourselves. We then have to be doers of the word and not hearers only (see James 1:22).

In Matthew 25:34-36 the Lord Jesus says to the righteous: *"...Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me."* The righteous asked when they had done these things (Matthew 25:44). The King replied, *"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"* (Matthew 25:45). This shows us that we are responsible to share that which the Lord gives us knowing that those who are faithful in little will be faithful in much (see Luke 19:11-26). Surely, the last half of Matthew 10:8 applies to all of us: *"...freely ye have received; freely give."*

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