

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Experiencing the Psalms” Lesson 6. (Psalms 23 & 24). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>**

Primary resources: James L. Mays, *Psalms*, 1994, John Knox Press; *Shepherd's Notes on the Psalms*, 1999, Broadman & Holman Publishers; *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV, 1991, Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan Publishing House.

**Introduction:** Last week, we read Psalm 22 which united the language of suffering and celebration in one significant sweep of unity. Because Jesus chose to recite the opening line “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” on the cross, one can reasonably conclude that Jesus identified completely with humanity. He suffered and died as one of us – one of the “afflicted.” In Psalm 22, it was the dying of one who trusted in the LORD that allowed God’s people (including us) to raise the question: “where is God?” Conversely, the reality of the Savior’s salvation on the cross gives us the answer. It assures us, as the Psalmist made clear, that God “*has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one. He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.*” (22:24). In this respect, one could compare Psalm 22 with the picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10), the one who lays down his life for the sheep.

**Now read Psalm 23 completely through.** As you read, note the pictures that emerge of the individual and the Lord. Think also about the focus of the Shepherd’s care on one person. It is this aspect that gives this Psalm such powerful force and uniqueness.

- Now describe the type of troubles facing the Psalmist. Given the opening line, do you think one with such a close relationship with God should confront the type enemies described? Can you identify with the Psalmist? Discuss.
- Review what the Psalmist says the Lord has provided for him.
  - According to the Psalm (note particularly verse 3), why does the Lord comfort and guide the Psalmist? Is this true of Christians today? Discuss.
  - When the Psalmist says that as a consequence of his relationship with the Lord, “*I shall not be in want*” (verse 1), can you identify with that observation? Can you share examples from your own life? Discuss.
- Note the very last verse. What does this Psalmist expect for “*all the days of my life*”? Do you think this is an eternal truth for Christians today? Discuss.
- Now read Hebrews 13:20-21. In this New Testament verse, we encounter another shepherding description of Christ. What strikes you about the description? Do you think it applies to the picture in Psalm 23? Discuss.
- Now read Revelation 7:15-17. What picture is given of the “Great Shepherd” in this passage? Does this picture give you comfort or not? Discuss.

**Now read Psalm 24 completely through:** In Psalm 23 and the New Testament descriptions of Christ as the “Great Shepherd,” one great truth appears to be that God-in-Christ is a Shepherd to His people, guiding them through trouble and turmoil, and blessing them **because of who He is:** “*He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake*” (23:3b). As you read through Psalm 24, look for reasons to substantiate or invalidate the idea that God acts in this fashion.

- Now re-read 24:1-2:
  - In what descriptive way does the Psalmist identify God? Discuss.
  - Thinking again of the Psalmist's opening declaration of God's complete sovereignty over all that exists, have you made this truth the central organizing principle in your life? If so, what difference has it made? If not, what difference do you think it would make? Discuss.
  
- Re-read 24:3-4: The Psalmist identifies those who have the right to approach the LORD.
  - What do you think the Psalmist means by his descriptions? Discuss.
  - If you understood that the term "*clean hands*" is used more as an ethical description meaning those that are innocent of doing wrong against others, and the "*pure heart*" often describes one who acts and thinks in a manner according to God's Will (for a New Testament example, read Jesus' words in Matt 5:8), would that change your conclusions? Discuss.
  
- Re-read 24:5-6: The disciplined lifestyle of servanthood or surrender appears to result in two gifts. What are they and what does this Psalm suggest is necessary if one is to obtain them? Discuss.
  
- Finally, re-read 24:7-10: This Psalm concludes with a powerful description of the LORD. As an aside, this Psalm equates the LORD with the "*King of Glory*," the only appearance of this title in the Old Testament.
  - What is the description provided and what does it mean to you? Discuss.
  - Would you agree that an apparent benefit of righteous living within the context of acknowledging God as sovereign LORD is that the petitioner (for example: Psalmist) can be honored by the Presence of this sovereign "King of Glory"? What does this mean to you personally? Discuss.
  - Now read the third "shepherding" description of Christ found in 1 Peter 5:1-4. How does Peter describe the "Chief Shepherd" in this passage? Do you think this relates to the 24<sup>th</sup> Psalm? In what way? Discuss

**Final Reflections:** We are indeed unbelievably blessed, not only to have the "good Shepherd" in Christ who laid down His life for us, we are also blessed to have:

Jesus, as the "Great Shepherd" – the one brought back from the dead who in His resurrection life will guide His people through the wilderness of this world to God's final rest

Jesus as the "Chief Shepherd" – the one who reappears in glory and power bringing everlasting blessing: "release" for the oppressed (Luke 4:18) and a place where nations will walk by the glory of God (Rev 21:24).

What do these truths mean to you today? Discuss.