

It is Finished!

Well the season of Lent is almost half over and our journey of faith draws us nearer to the cross. This morning, I want to talk to you about two of the Old Testament Psalms that inform our understanding of the cross and of what Jesus meant when he prayed there, *"It is finished."*

So let's talk about a very familiar Psalm, Psalm 23. Why talk about it again? Well, I really believe that every time we look at God's Word, the Holy Spirit reveals something new to us and get some new revelation of who God really is. Now that new insight, doesn't make what we already know about God obsolete, because we always build on what we already know. But I believe that God brings truth into our lives at the very moment we need it. Hopefully, that's what will happen for you this morning.

Now to talk about Psalm 23 you need to talk about Psalm 22. But before we look at those two Psalms, I want to remind you of a verse of scripture that we talked about last week. John 14:20. Jesus said:

"When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

Let's remember, that this day Jesus was talking about is our present reality; He is risen from the dead. We are a resurrection people. He is alive in us.

Now just as modern song writers often write songs that are related to each other, the Psalmist often did the same thing with his songs. So Bible scholars have always seen a connection between Psalm 22 and Psalm 23.

So let's go to Psalm 22. The opening line, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Sound familiar? Of course it does. Jesus quoted those words from the cross. *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Popular theology suggests that Jesus prayed that prayer because on the cross God had turned his back on Him because he was carrying all of our sin. But that's just not true. Psalm 22:24 says,

*"For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help".*

Second Corinthians 5:19 affirms that truth:

"For God was IN Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them."

"God was in Christ." That's why we have to get out of our heads the idea that God abandoned Jesus on the cross. We have to understand that the three persons in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are never at cross purposes with each other. They are always "at one" in your salvation.

When Jesus quotes Psalm 22, he is actually quoting a well-known popular psalm or song that everyone knew, just like a familiar song comes on the radio and we start to sing along. So here's Jesus. Hanging on the cross. He says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". He says this in front of people who know the rest of the psalm. Their memories kick in. They run through the words in their heads. And they get to verses 16-18:

*"My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.*

*They have pierced my hands and feet.
I can count all my bones.*

*My enemies stare at me and gloat.
They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing."*

Suddenly they get the message. You have a Messiah and you are killing him right in front of your own eyes. Wow! Read the whole of Psalm 22 in light of the cross and pay particular attention to the closing verses:

³⁰ *"Our children will also serve him.*

Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.

³¹ *His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born.*

They will hear about everything he has done".

We are all proof, by our very presence here today that Psalm 22 is true and that God's promise are to be trusted. And that leads us into Psalm 23 which, in this light, is the journey of the Christian life. How many of you know Psalm 23 by heart? Most of us right? OK. Help me out.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

³ *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

⁴ *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.*

⁵ *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

⁶ *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."*

Isn't there something so spiritually powerful about that Psalm that once you've heard it, it's part of your spiritual DNA for ever?

So if Psalm 22 is a prophetic picture of what happened on the cross, Psalm 23 is the road map of the Christian life. Again, remember John 14:20:

"When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

Well, in that place where I am surrendered to God – *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."* In him I lack nothing. I lack nothing because Christ in all his glory and provision lives in me.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." The Christian journey begins from a position of rest. Now we think that rest comes after we work. But God says that's not the way it is in the Christian life. *"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."* The Christian life starts from a position of rest. It begins when you adopt a posture of rest in God and in his peace and contentment. Matthew 11:28. Jesus said,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Rest is where we begin in our relationship with God because as Scripture reminds us in Acts 17:28 that it is, *"in him we live and move and have our being."*

Our Christian journey begin in rest. Then we get up and walk. *"He leadeth me beside the still waters."* God has a special relationship with water. He

turns it into wine. He walks on it. He calms the storm. He offers us the waters of eternal life. So, to walk beside "*the still waters*" is another way of talking about us walking in peace. Think here about the story of how Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and calmed the storm. Scripture says, in Ephesians 2:14, about Jesus, "*He is our peace.*" The prophet Isaiah (9:6) called Jesus, "*The Prince of peace.*"

As a Christian, Ephesians 6:15 says that you wear the shoes of the "*gospel of peace*". That means that when you walk into any situation, you are a bearer of peace. When there is stress, turmoil or tension in any situation, you allow the Holy Spirit to speak through you so you can release God's peace into that situation. John 14:20:

"I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

Sometimes we will extend peace through words that we speak. Sometimes it may just be by placing a reassuring hand on someone's shoulder. And sometimes it will just be by your calm presence in a room. But make no mistake, you are a bearer of Christ's peace.

The Christian life begins in rest. You then walk in peace as He lives in you. And in that place of peace, "*He restoreth my soul*". Simply put, your soul is your mind, will and emotions and Scripture says of God, Isaiah 26:3:

"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!"

God restores my soul so I can be in a position of perfect peace; mind, will and emotions surrendered to God.

"He leadeth me in paths of righteousness." Put really simply, righteousness is simply a natural overflow of what happens when we begin in rest, walk in peace, with mind, will and emotions surrendered to God, as Christ lives in you.

Now get this. What have you done to earn that righteousness? Nothing! Scripture says clearly; The Lord is my shepherd. He provides for me. He makes me lie down. He walks beside me. He restores my soul. That's what Jesus meant when he cried from the cross, "*It is finished!*"

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me." Now what does that mean? It means that when

you encounter the valleys of life, you don't walk alone. The only reason that he leads you there is so that you understand that death is only a valley. That the resurrection change everything. It's so you understand that in that place where you and he walk, "*fear and evil*" have no power over you. For He is with you. He is alive in you.

Now here's a weird thought. "*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" Now some of us are old enough to remember a time when a rod brought no comfort to us at all. It was an instrument of punishment. In the spiritual context, we associate a rod with God's judgement. Of the hammer coming down on us. And that's the whole point. A rod is a horrible thing, unless you remember that God is for you and not against you.

Think of yourself in court. Surrounded by your accusers. The judge hears the evidence. It's clear you are guilty. The judge issues the verdict. "Innocent of all charges". Everyone is stunned. By the way, that's called grace. And yes, you don't deserve it. But that's the good news. God the Father doesn't let our sin dictate how He deals with us, or how he feels about us. It's an amazing thought. Your sin has no power to control God and how God feels about you. And that reveals just how powerless sin really is. That's why Scripture says in Philippians 1:6:

"That God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished . . ."

You see, God loves you more than you can imagine because He made you in his image. And so, in that context, his rod and staff don't bring you punishment. They bring you comfort because you know that God's judgements are for you, not against you. That's why the gospel is such good news.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." In Hebrew culture, to break bread with someone at your table, was to come into a place not necessarily of agreement but with the hope that we could be reconciled for our mutual good. Now you all know that Jesus was criticized by the holy people of his day for eating with sinners. Those holy people were worried that Jesus righteousness would be defiled by the unholy people's sin. But Jesus just couldn't wait to get into the presence of sinners so that his righteousness would defile their sin. As he said in Mark 2:17:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

At the table God's grace breaks in!

"Thou anointest my head with oil". Anointing with oil was reserved for priests and kings. That ritual wasn't for ordinary people. "My cup runneth over". That's a reference to royalty. Only kings had cups that ran over out of their abundant wealth. Not common folk who struggle to make ends meet. But listen to this New Testament verse, First Peter 2:9 applies this part of Psalm 23 to us:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession"

That's why when the apostle Paul addressed Christians in his New Testament letters, he didn't call them sinners, but saints. Why? Because when Christ came to take up residence in you, he made you holy. He made you holy. No wonder Psalm 23 then says:

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"

That's what God is doing through you. As you move through this world as a Christian you are leaving a trail of goodness, and mercy and love wherever you go, whether you are always aware of that or not. And here's where we land:

"and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

A more literal translation of that is actually *"And I will be the dwelling place of God forever."* As Jesus promised. *"I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you".* Wow! No wonder Jesus cried from the cross *"It is finished"*. Yes it is. Thanks be to God.

Pastoral Prayer

Indwelling God,

Sometimes the good news of the gospel is so astounding, so overwhelming, that we can scarcely take it in.

We look at ourselves and we see how far we fall short of being Christ- like in our thoughts, words and actions and we cry out "Woe is me. I am ruined".

But when you look at us, your face is full of love, mercy and compassion. You remind us that in Jesus Christ you have removed all of our sin – and that you remember it no more.

Remind us anew that the work of the cross is a finished work. That there is nothing more to be said or done. That because you live we live also. Christ within us, the hope of glory.

Help us to live our lives in such a way that when others look at us they see Jesus within us.

Help us to give comfort to those who mourn:

To work for Justice for the oppressed:

To bring hope to the desperate.

In every situation we find ourselves in
may we bring the peace of Christ.

Into every dark place,

may we bring the light of Christ.

To every wounded and broken person,

may we be the healing touch of Christ.

Almighty God, there is so much need and hurt and brokenness in our world. May the transforming power of Christ flow through us in such a way that the life of Jesus may be seen by all around us. Amen.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to the reflections of author and pastor Bill Vanderbush for his thoughts that inspired this message.