

Restoration of a Backslider

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Bible Text: Psalm 23

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King David was uniquely fitted to write Psalm 23. He was a shepherd and was in that capacity when God took him from the sheepfold and made him a king. King David was a man after God's own heart. He loved God with all his heart and sought him as a deer panteth after the water brooks. But King David was also a backslider who backed away from God and through disobedience and the deceitfulness of sin grieved the heart of God with his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite.

God had this to say about David's departure from him through sin, found in chapter 11 of 2 Samuel. "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." In fact, chapter 11 of 2 Samuel is a portrait of a real Chapter 11 of bankruptcy in the life of David. Spiritual bankruptcy through willful sin.

My message today, friends, is an exposition of Psalm 23 and it is entitled, "The Restoration of a Backslider." For it is a picture of the restoration of a backslidden sheep restored to the shepherd. Psalm 23 is not written about a goat, a lost person but it speaks of sheep, a saved person who needed restoration to his shepherd. A Christian can be a backslider. I know some may argue this point from a theological stance and say, "No, a Christian cannot backslide. If a person sins willfully then that person is really lost." That's not what my Bible teaches. My Bible speaks of backsliders and their restoration to God.

Psalm 23 speaks on this topic for it is about a sheep who went astray and needed to be brought back to a right relationship with the Good Shepherd. I know the sad moments in my own life where I have strayed away from my Shepherd. But in his grace, mercy and great love he has always fetched me back. A Christian is a person who will always be fetched back and restored to a right relationship with Christ Jesus because my Bible states in Philippians, being confident in this very thing. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Our salvation originated with God. He began the good work of grace in our hearts and as long as we live in our imperfect state, in this sin-soaked world, we can rest assured that God will carry on that work of salvation in our lives until we finish our course and he crowns the work of his hands.

Psalm 23 speaks about a sheep and a shepherd and it is personalized. The Lord is my shepherd, I am his sheep, though I stray he will go after me because that is what he does. My heart and nature is prone to wander, prone to follow other voices that lead me astray

from the shepherd of my soul. But Jesus will always come fetch me back. He loves me with a love so great, so unfathomable that it surpasses human understanding, an unconditional love that began in the heart of God. Before the foundation of the world was laid, I was in the heart of God. Ephesians speaks of this very thing. "According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will."

In the Bible, believers are compared to sheep. Unbelievers are compared to goats. Goats are hard-headed and go the wrong way. Sheep need the tender care and leading of a shepherd. A sheep is probably the dumbest of all animals. It continually gets into difficulties. One sheep goes into a ditch and two more will follow it then they all have to be dragged out by the shepherd. A sheep is prone to wander away from the fold. It is the shepherd's job to go after the strayed sheep and restore it to the fold and place it back under his care to bind up its wounds with oil and restore it to stay near his side. The great hem come thou fount of every blessing speaks of the grace of God and my wandering nature. Oh to grace, have greater debtor daily I am constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

This message today, friends, is about a wandering sheep restored to his shepherd. Perhaps you are that sheep. Perhaps you have strayed from the heart of God through sin. Perhaps you are in a dry place needing spiritual nourishment. You long again for the green pastures spoken of in Psalm 23. You know you are unhappy in your sin. You are sick of feeding on the gravel of sin. You are malnourished, dejected, in despair over your sin and your departure from God. You want to come back but you don't know how. Oh friend, Jesus will fetch you back. The Bible declares, "Return to me and I will return to you." That's a promise, friend. God has grace for you to return to him. God has the grace repentance ready for you now. Turn aside now and turn back to him is the theme of this message today. He will restore you.

Let us read Psalm 23 together right now, "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."

Isn't that beautiful, friend? Psalm 23 has been described as a pearl and it is lovely like a pearl and rich like a pearl. It is important to our understanding of Psalm 23 to realize its position between Psalm 22 and Psalm 24. All three are fitted together like a string of pearls. One speaks of a cross, one speaks of a crook and one speaks of a crown. In Psalm 22, Jesus is my Savior on a cross for my sin. For it was my sins that nailed him there to that bloody tree. My wretched sins that made him cry out in agony. "My God, my God,

why hast thou forsaken me!” My sins which made my Savior bleed. My sins which made him die for me. He died for me and he died for you friend. Your sins nailed him there. Your sins made him bleed. Your sins caused the death of Christ. My sins, your sins nailed him there to that tree.

So as Psalm 22 speaks of my redemption from sin by my Savior, Psalm 23 speaks of me as his sheep saved from sin but prone to wander. Psalm 24 speaks of Christ as king, the King of glory, wearing a crown. The great Bible teacher Graham Scroggie had this to say about these three Psalms and their relation to one another. “Psalms 22, 23 and 24 bare an exceedingly interesting relation to one another. In 22, Christ is the Savior. In 23, he is the Shepherd. And in 24, he is the Sovereign. Psalm 22 tells of his grace, 23 of guidance and 24 of glory. In 22 we see the cross, in 23 the crook and in 24 the crown. Psalm 22 is related to the past, 23 to the present and 24 to the future. Here surely is what the Puritans would call a whole body of divinity.”

Isn't it beautiful, friend, how God has divinely arranged the scriptures for our benefit. How sweet these three Psalms are, they speak of Christ suffering for me, Christ shepherding of me and Christ sovereignty over me. How sweet is the grace of God. How deep is his love. How great is his forgiveness.

Psalm 23 speaks of a sheep in need of restoration. A sheep hungry for green pastures. A sheep thirsty for still waters. When we go astray through sin and backslide, we leave the protective care of the shepherd. What great danger we court when we go out and sin, when we get out from under his wing and his care. Our sin often leads us to dry places where there is no nourishment. Our sin causes us to fall into a ditch where we need deliverance. Our sin makes us sick in soul where we need healing. Sin is a tyrant. It is cruel, unsatisfying and demanding. Christ on the other hand, is a king, a loving king who has our best interests at heart.

Listen to the words of the Puritan, Isaac Ambrose, as he speaks of sin as a tyrant in the life of a backslider. “I grant there is some difference among divines in their expressions concerning the sins of God's own people. Though they mean one and the self same thing, some call them only the sin of infirmity and others grant the name of reigning sins. But with this limitation that this is not a total reigning. Sin reigneth as a tyrant over them, not as a king. At some times, as in David's case, the will and consent may run along with sin. No actual resistance may be made against sin at all and yet at the very same time, the seed of God remained in them, 1 John 3:9, though it seems dead. And in God's own time that very seed will revive again and throw out the tyrant. There cannot be that antecedent and consequent consent to sin in the godly as in the wicked. Oh my soul, consider this, if the virtue of Christ's life come in it will take down that sovereign high reign of sin which the wicked suffer, and will not strive against. The flesh indeed may sometimes lust against the spirit but it shall not totally prevail or get the upper hand. Romans 6:14 declares, Sin shall not have dominion over you.”

Yes, friends, we can take our eyes off our hepherd and wander into sin. We must not abuse the grace of God and live in Antinomianism. No, sir, but we have this hope and

surety that if we do wander away from Christ our shepherd and sin, he is more than able to come fetch us back again. We are his sheep, his shepherdly care is continually over us. Even if we go astray and sin, we have this promise from 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God is just in his Son and his promise to him that those who come through him shall be forgiven on his account.

Listen to the wise comments of Matthew Henry, the Bible commentator on Psalm 23, verse 3. "He restoreth my soul. Henry comments, When after one sin David's heart smote him and after another Nathan was sent to tell him, Thou art the man, God restored his soul. Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin he will not suffer them to lie still in it."

I know I've made some imperfect track friends as I have walked along the narrow way. But bless God, I'm still on the way. Oh friend, how true that is. Jesus our shepherd will grant us the grace of repentance. Jesus our shepherd will go after us and fetch us again and restore a right relationship to him. He will settle us in the green pastures of his holy word so we may feed there and renourish our souls. He will lead us beside the still waters of his presence where all is peace once again, where we can walk uprightly with our God in a red-hot love relationship with him once again. Did not the risen Christ speak to his people in Revelation chapter 2, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, "I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience." And then in verse 4 he states, "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee because thou has left thou first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of its place except thou repent."

Oh friend, is it not our departure from our first love that leads us into sin? When our eyes go after others, the world, the flesh and the devil then we leave the shepherd of our souls and end up in a backslidden state. But the promise of the Psalmist states, "He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me into paths of righteousness for his name's sake." God will defend his holy name. Oh, the sadness of sin and the reproach it brings on our God, it robs God of his glory. He is the King of Glory.

Psalm 24 states, beginning in verse 8, "Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah."

Is this not a picture of revival where the king of glory comes in? When Christ our shepherd restores us to a right relationship with him then we can experience a personal revival. We have once again the joy of our salvation restored to us and we sing a new song. Our heart beats after him, we long to be in his presence and to never leave the side of our shepherd again. Oh, for a red-hot love relationship with Jesus Christ. This is accomplished through his grace. He is the restorer, he is our shepherd, he is the initiator.

Remember this friend, about Psalm 23, it is very personal. It is about me and my shepherd and no one else is around. It is about you and your shepherd, you have him all to yourself. Goodness and mercy will follow you as a believer and a follower of the Lamb. Satan and sin are tyrants who will starve you, they will feed you the gravel of sin. In that barren place of sin there is no rest, no peace, only unrest. But Christ our Redeemer will bring us back into a right relationship with him. He will restore us, make us to lie down in green pastures and lead us by still waters with the peace of Christ. He will lead us in paths of righteousness as he perfects his work of ongoing sanctification in our lives. He does this for his name's sake and for his glory. Who is the King of glory? The Lord of Hosts. He is the King of glory. Selah.

Jesus restores for two reasons: for our safety and for his honor. O friend, if you have strayed from Jesus, look unto him. Turn back again and rest on the promise of God's word, "Return to me and I will return to you." Come to him now and ask him for the grace of repentance for his restoration of peace to bring you back into a right relationship with him. There is peace there. There is joy there. There is safety there. There is hope there with our blessed hope and shepherd of our souls.