

PSALM 23

Douglas Buchanan

This is without doubt my favourite bible passage. It is a statement of truth, a poem of love, a song of praise, a journey with God, a promise of eternal life. Yes, it is all of these.

Everyone will relate to this passage – many will know it off by heart. It is probably the first bible passage that you did learn and have never forgotten.

We start with the analogy of the life of a shepherd. The work of a shepherd is a most responsible job. The shepherd provides for his flock (which represents the means of living and survival for the family), watches over them and protects them. This is the reason shepherds were told to go to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. As we know, shepherds are very important in the teaching of both Old and New Testaments. The kings in Israel were seen as the shepherds of the people, to care for them and look after them; God was seen as the Chief Shepherd, the ultimate king of His people.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” What could be more simple yet so dramatic? What could be more all embracing and yet so personal? “My shepherd!” And we know from many other bible passages that the Lord Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd, but also our Master, Saviour and King. So here we have a personal relationship with the King of Kings, Lord of Lords. How amazing is that!

“I shall not be in want.” You know, when you think about it, throughout our lives, we really lack for nothing. Yes, there are some things that would make us more comfortable, but really we have all we need. Most importantly, God is at our side, He knows what we need and He has provided everything that we require.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul.” When you have some trouble or problem in your life, these words just make you relax and know that everything will be taken care of by God. Green pastures, peaceful and delightful; quiet waters, thoughtful and prayerful; are these not such pleasant places to trust in God and to regain your love for life?

“He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” God wants us to be on the straight and narrow path all our lives so that we can be faithful to him. He gives us gifts and he wants us to use these gifts to and honour his name above all other names. He helps us maintain that stability.

“Even 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.” Up to this point we have been talking about God. Now the emphasis is in talking to God: “You are with me”. As sheep lead a precarious life on hillsides trying to find food and can get lost, so we often have times in our lives when we are out of our comfort zone. At these times we should call on God who will protect us and guide us on what action to take. He will reassure us. We can also relate this to the eternal life given to us by Jesus and for this reason Psalm 23 is a very often used as part of a funeral service.

“You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Here we have God providing for us even although non-believers are all around us. We are being looked after through his grace and mercy. Perhaps it is also a message of what is to happen to Jesus as he prepares his final journey into Jerusalem. God is preparing the way for him on his journey that will lead to his confrontation with his enemies, his death and his resurrection.

“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.” Through God’s grace we have been given the love of Jesus Christ, who will forgive us our failings and allow us to walk with Him throughout our lives.

“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” Surely the greatest words that comfort us in our journey through life. As Jesus makes a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he is preparing a way for us to live forever in his sight.

Let us give thanks for the shepherd in our lives, for He is looking after us on our life’s journey and has allowed us, by his grace, into His kingdom.

### HERE COMES THE KING!

James Dewar

Here’s a picture of the Queen’s Rolls Royce: what kind of person rides in this car?

Here’s a picture of a Mini Minor – would the Queen ride in this car on state visit? No! Why not? How would she feel if this was presented to her?

Here’s a picture of a famous war horse – Bucephalus! The war horse of Alexander the Great; at the head of a great army he marched across Europe and into the Middle East conquering the nations and creating the great Greek Empire! A great king/Emperor needs a great horse!

Here’s a picture of a donkey. Would Alexander Great ride one of these? Why not? How would he feel if this was presented to him as his transport? Humiliated.

*Zechariah 9:9*: what a great promise for the people: the people are to rejoice and celebrate because the king is coming, a good king, a king who loves everything that is good and right; a king who is going to rescue them from their enemies and there were plenty of them around; so this great king will come and conquer everything in front of Him and ride a great war horse as he does so. But wait: “*Gentle...*” That’s not right; a king riding a donkey; how humiliating! It’s just not the way it should be done, but that is God’s promise that one day a King would come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey and He would rescue his people and that should be a day of great rejoicing. He would be a King would care for His people like a shepherd caring for sheep.

So, it is Sunday morning, the week before Passover; Jesus and His friends are going towards Jerusalem; there are lots of other little groups of people making the same trip to be there for Passover. As they get near the city Jesus sent two friends to go to find a donkey and they find it and bring it to Him and they throw their coats over the donkey’s back for Jesus to sit on and he sits on the donkey and begins to ride into Jerusalem. Then the others begin to throw their coats on the road as the donkey walks over them; its like a kind of great red carpet – someone important is coming; a great King! The crowd begins to shout

“Hosanna”, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” and wave their palm branches.

Jesus the king: the servant king, gentle – that’s the message of riding on the donkey; He is not a great warrior to overpower everyone, but gentle to serve; by the end of the week, Jesus the servant will have died, He will have laid down His life for others, for us, as a servant to meet our needs; gentle, humble, loving, serving. But He is also a conquering king, because next Sunday we celebrate Easter, Jesus raised from the dead, conquered sin, and death and He is a great and glorious King in presence of God.

Hand-Me-Downs Colossians 3:12-17

Martin Elliot

I have called this bit of the service Hand-Me-Downs and if any of you have had older brothers or sisters then you may well have been the recipient of hand me downs, clothes, toys and other things that you reuse after the original owner has finished with them. Some people hate hand me downs and some people don’t mind them. I think this is usually related to who they come from - if when we’re younger we really respect an older brother or sister then we feel that wearing the same things as they did will maybe make us more like them. Then as we get older we often don’t want to use hand me downs as we want to choose our own things. However, sometimes hand me downs can be really valued. The cufflinks I am wearing today are the ones I wear most often, and I have been asked about them before when I’ve worn them because they have the initials JGC on them, nothing like my own initials. This is because they belonged to my Grandad and have been handed down to me. They are very precious to me because my Grandad was someone I admired and they remind me of him. They also make me feel a bit closer to him because I am wearing something that he wore.

Our final passage today tells us about hand me downs that don’t come from your older brother or sister, but come from Jesus.

We will now read from Paul’s letter to the Colossians, Chapter 3, verses 12-17.

This passage tells us about various traits which Jesus “wore” and has now passed onto all Christians to wear. Paul lists several items which we should wear:

1. Compassion and Kindness: This is something which we saw Jesus demonstrate throughout his ministry, helping those in need, often those who had been rejected by the society of the time. He even showed compassion to those who wished to harm him. In the Easter story we hear how he healed one of the men who came to arrest him after one of the disciples had cut his ear off. The challenge for us is to follow this example and show compassion for those we see in need, and, where we can, turn that compassion into action, by showing kindness, even when they are people who have wronged us.
2. Humility - The night before he was crucified Jesus taught the disciples the meaning of humility when he knelt down and started washing their feet. In a society where we are taught to look after number one, it can be difficult to put others first, but that is exactly what Jesus taught us to do. In Luke 14:11 he says “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

3. Gentleness – This refers to our attitude to those around us. Gentleness means that we don't lose control but remain calm in difficult or frustrating situations. Before his death Jesus knew that he would be betrayed and denied by his own disciples but he didn't get angry or protest. Instead, Jesus taught us to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, and subdue our harsh nature with gentleness. He also showed it after the resurrection when he spoke to Thomas, who wouldn't believe that he had risen from the dead until he saw him with his own eyes. How do we deal with those around us, do we maintain a calm and gentle nature or do we let our anger and frustration show? Paul tells us that a Gentle nature is part of the Christian outfit, so we have to choose whether or not to wear it.
4. Patience: In a world in which everything moves so fast and we expect everything yesterday, it can be hard to be patient. During Easter week and throughout his ministry we see Jesus demonstrating patience, particularly with the disciples who would often not get what Jesus was trying to tell them, or slip back into old habits. Yet Jesus did not get frustrated but would patiently explain to the Disciples. The word used here can also mean long suffering. The Christian journey is not an easy ride and involves many challenges but Jesus tells us that if we can demonstrate patience and endure these the rewards in Heaven will be great.
5. Forgiving: Often the hardest aspect of Jesus' character to put on which is why we ask God for help with it every week when we say "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". If we have been wronged by somebody it is very difficult to forgive them for it, but if we don't our hearts will be filled with anger instead of love. This week we are reminded how much God has done to forgive us, sending his own son to the Cross, and even then we hear Jesus say "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"
6. Love: The final item Paul tells us to put on is love. Unlike the other pictures on the screen, it is not coincidence that I have used a belt for love as love is what holds the rest in place. Without it, the other qualities would just fall away. Jesus is the ultimate example of love. 1 John 3:16 says that "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." As we begin this Easter week, Christian love should be at the centre of our being. Love for God and love for those around us. If you have this, all the other qualities will follow.

The Message translation of the Bible calls these qualities the "the wardrobe God picked out for you". Like many hand me downs you may think that this wardrobe is old and outdated. You may not like hand me downs and prefer to pick out your own clothes and don't want anyone else telling you what to wear. But remember that this isn't your mother commanding you to get dressed. This is God. You've got to make the decision about whether or not you're going to put them on. No one's going to dress you or force you. It's up to you.

But remember who wore this originally, as we get ready this week to look at Jesus' journey from his triumphant entry to Jerusalem to the cross and then his resurrection, we will see him wearing all of these qualities and maybe it will make it easier for us to choose to wear these clothes that he has passed onto us. Just as these cufflinks are precious to me because they are from my Grandad, so this "wardrobe God picked out for you" should be precious to us as it was worn by Jesus, and by wearing it we can draw close to one we admire and make ourselves more like Him.