

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
September 24, 2017

Satisfied Life

Psalm 23

23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

23:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

23:3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

23:4 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.

23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

I think that Psalm 23 is one of the the most beloved Psalm. Many people might memorize and recite without opening the Bible. If you have not memorized yet, please do so. This year we have chosen the verse of the year from Colossians 3:16. “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” I think Psalm 23 is the first one to be dwelt in us.

1. Shepherd and Sheep

Psalm 23 is like a “Word Picture”. When we read and recite this Psalm, there is a scenery in front of our eyes. Blue sky with no cloud, huge endless green pastures under the sky. A stream is running, water surface is shining under the sun light. Sheep are eating grass until full.

They drink water until their thirst would be healed. Little sheep are running around. They sleep safely when tired. These scene is showing the satisfied lives as Psalm says, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” in the beginning .

However, even there are plenty green pastures and water, if these places are not safe, sheep can not eat grass nor drink water. Psalm 23 mentions “the valley of the shadow of death” and “evil” (verse 4) and “enemies” (verse 5). For sheep, “evil” may mean the place where they can’t come back after get lost, and also other animals try to attack them. Therefore, when I draw this scene in my mind, I add these things under green pastures. In this world, all is not green pastures. Failure is waiting after success, temptation is hiding behind the pleasure. When we are in peace, all of sudden disaster might come over us.

Therefore, sheep need their shepherd to keep them and lead them. Even there are rich green and plenty of water for their thirst, they can’t enjoy these things without the shepherd.

We are same. Today most of us, especially who live in the rich countries like Japan and the States do not often lack the food. Even so, many of us can’t enjoy satisfied lives. We live dissatisfied, complaining and worried. Many of us do not see the satisfied livings and are hiding inside and resigning ourselves. Why these things happen? Because the richness is not automatically gained when materials are gaining. Until we have the peace from the God, we can’t give gratitude and enjoy them.

Then, I draw a shepherd in the center when I draw the picture of Psalm 23 in my mind. I am sure you do the same. How would you

draw the shepherd? My shepherd is Jesus who holds a lamb in his left arm. He holds a rod and a staff in his right hand. The stick and lash of shepherd are used to turn troublesome animals to sheep away. When there are things disturb our mind, the Lord will use the lash and turn it away. Also, the tip of the stick is curved as the question mark is curved. When the lambs get lost, the shepherd uses the curve to catch the lost lambs. For us, when we get lost, Lord will find and catch us. As verse 4 says, “your rod and your staff, they comfort me,” the rod and staff of Lord will protect us, lead us and comfort us.

If the sheep are weakened or wounded, the shepherd carries them on his shoulder or holds and takes care of them in his arm. Even if we become very weak or get wounded, we can feel satisfaction because we are embraced in the Lord’s arm. We, as believers, can not receive the fully satisfied life from environment or our own power. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” As it says, the fully satisfied life comes from the shepherd, our Lord.

Do you have the Lord as your shepherd? Do you confess “Lord, you are my shepherd”? Do you keep the attitude that you follow the Lord who is your shepherd? Do stay in the faith which you had the Lord as your shepherd? The Lord is only one who gives us true satisfaction. Do you try to be filled by other things? “The Lord is my shepherd.” If you do not have this faith, you can not say, “I shall not want.” However, If you believe that “the Lord is my shepherd”, you can say “I shall not want” even though you are very weak, wounded, or walk in the valley of death. We are fulfilled by not “green pasture” nor “still water,” but by the Lord himself.

2. Master and Guest

Verse 1 to 4 describes a shepherd and his sheep, but verse 5 to 6 describes a master and his guests. In the ancient Middle East, when a master of the house welcomes guests, he washes the feet of the guests with water and exchanges kisses, then anoints their head with oil. We can see it through Jesus' words. When He was invited to a Pharisee's house, a woman came up to Jesus and anointed oil onto His feet. It was an act of gratitude to Jesus, but the Pharisee criticized her in their heart. Then, Jesus said as follows in Luke 7:44-46 "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment." Although the Pharisee welcomed Jesus as his guest, it was not a heartfelt welcome. That is why they did not anoint oil onto Jesus' head.

Usually, when a master welcomes his guests, he hands the cup to guests and pours wine to fill up the cup. That is to express his overflowing friendship as "the wine overflows the cup." Therefore, Psalm 23:5 "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" is a song for our joy that we are accepted as important friends of Lord with love.

Moreover, the master is a "king." The Scripture says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." This table means a meal that a king provides to his soldiers before the battle. We also are invited to the table of the Lord as the friend of our King, Jesus. Jesus

called his disciples “friends” and poured his love into them. At the last supper, the Lord gave a cup to his disciples, which was filled with His love.

The last supper was, as Psalm 23 describes, the supper before the enemies. The enemies of sin and death. The Lord was facing death, which was the last enemy of human beings. The Lord defeated death by His own death and He was about to give eternal life by resurrection. As shepherds guide their sheep out from the valley of the shadow of death to green pasture, Jesus, our Lord of life, saves believers from death and give them eternal life, and guide them into eternal kingdom. Verse 6 says “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” Believers will not only be filled with His blessings and love while they live on this earth, but they will also be filled with His love in heaven. What a satisfied life we have!

Psalm 23 is beautifully described in the Lord’s Supper. We, believers, are just a servant to the Lord Jesus, but He treats us like his guest at the Lord’s Supper and welcomes us and assures us with his friendship. Even if there is “the valley of the shadow of death” or “enemies” in front of us, the Lord will protect us, guide us, and save us. His blessing is shown at the Lord’s Supper. As the Scripture says, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.... my cup overflows,” we would like to experience the joy of the fully satisfied life during the Lord’s Supper.

(Prayer)

Dear God the Father, you sent your Son to this world as our shepherd

and accomplished what Psalm 23 had described. When we make the Lord as “our shepherd”, we can have the fully satisfied life. Please keep us from any mistakes that we search for our satisfaction other than You, Lord. Help us wish first to be with You always. We pray in the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.