The Shepherd King

1. Intro

- Life in a fallen, broken world is hard
- Of course there are times of great blessing that God bestows on us
 - Loving family
 - Joyful marriage
 - Rewarding job
- But even with those blessings ... life is still hard
 - Raising kids is hard work
 - Marriages go through tough times
 - Work is often stressful and unfulfilling
- And then there's the **really** hard stuff
 - Supporting aging parents
 - Struggling marriage
 - Wayward kids
 - Controlling parents
 - Hurtful behaviour
 - Belittling words
 - Chronic illness
- When we face tough times in life, as we inevitably will, often the thing we
 desire most is to be comforted
- We want someone
 - o to listen
 - o to be there and empathise with us in what we are going through
- We take solace in those times when someone puts an arm around us and gives us a shoulder to cry on
- In those times, we need something or someone to comfort us
- King David (who wrote this Psalm), was the great king of Israel approx 1000BC
- And it's fair to say ... King David had his fair share of trial and sufferings throughout his life
 - $\circ\hspace{0.4cm}$ Looked down upon and despised by all his older brothers
 - o Treated unjustly by King Saul
 - Forced to flee for his life and live as a fugitive as Saul tried to hunt him down and kill him
 - o Suffered tremendous guilt for his sin

- Wife who turned against him
- One son who died because of his own sinfulness
- Another son who killed his other sons
- How does a man deal with that amount of tragedy and hardship in life?
- What does a man like David cling to in the midst of such pain and suffering?
- Psalm 23 is David's answer to those questions
- This morning as we reflect on the struggles and dark days you and I have experienced or are currently experiencing ...
 - Psalm 23 is a wonderful psalm that shows us where we can find true comfort both now and for the future
 - It offers truths that will help us to have peace and hope in the midst of pain and uncertainty
- This morning, we're going to tackle this Psalm under two headings ..
 - God offers us comfort for the now
 - God offers us comfort for the future

2. God offers us comfort for the now

- First ... God offers us comfort for the now
- Psalm 23 is a wonderful Psalm
- And in v1 David says ... The Lord is my Shepherd
- When we think of a shepherd we instinctively think of the pastoral role of a shepherd
 - \circ One who cares for his flock ... tends them ... cares for them ... nurtures them
- This is a wonderful picture of the intimate relationship David has with the Lord God
 - He is not just a distant 'king' or 'deliverer'
 - He is much more than an impersonal 'rock' or 'shield'
 - $\circ\hspace{0.4cm}$ He is the shepherd to his people who are his flock
- The Lord is my shepherdis such a familiar phrase to so many people that it's possible to miss the magnitude of what David is saying here
- He's saying that the eternal God of the Universe is his personal shepherd
 - o David could have rightly said, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our shepherd',
 - o But he doesn't say this ... he saysThe Lord is **my** shepherd
 - $\circ\hspace{0.4cm}$ David has a very personal and intimate relationship with the Lord

- However David's description of the Lord as his shepherd has an even greater significance
- In ancient times, kings were often referred as the shepherds of their people
- And throughout the Old Testament, Israel's kings were considered the shepherds of God's people
- David himself was referred was both a shepherd and king
 - o **2 Samuel 5:2** In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"
- And so here's David ... the shepherd and king of Israel, referring to the Lord as **his** shepherd and king
- And so David knows ...
 - o the one who is shepherd is sovereign
 - o the one who is sovereign is shepherd
- And David knows that because the Lord is his shepherd ... then he shall not want
 - o The meaning here is not that David won't desire or want anything ...
 - o The meaning is that he won't be **left** wanting
 - We're being told that the Lord's sheep are not lacking anything
- But how is this true?
 - We don't even have to leave Psalm 23 to see that the Lord's sheep do indeed lack things
 - o In what sense then, can it be said that God's sheep shall not lack anything?
- John Piper is helpful here ... he says
 - "What David means is that God's sheep never lack anything that the Shepherd thinks is good for them." (repeat)
- And we see that in the next verse, for David says
 - He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside quiet waters
 - o What else to sheep want!
 - o Nice green grace to munch on and nice clean, still water to drink

- And just as green pastures and still waters revive and restore the wellbeing
 of a shepherd's flock ... so the presence and provision of the Lord is
 something that revives David's soul
 - To know that the Lord is
 - with him
 - guiding him
 - protecting him
 - care for him
 - Restores and refreshes David
- To have the Lord with him and watching over him gives peace and contentment and joy
- Even when David is walking through the valley of the shadow of death ... he has no need to fear evil
- · Even when David is going through dark days of
 - Suffering
 - Persecution
 - Anxiety
 - o Grief
 - He finds comfort in knowing that the Shepherd-King is no longer leading out in front ... but is walking right beside him ... with his
 - Rod to defend him
 - Staff to guide him

• Illustration – Footprints in the sand

- I remember when I first became a Christian I came across this poem called Footprints in the Sand
 - It's a bit kitschy, but it captures something of what David is describing in Psalm 23
- Goes like this
 - o One night a man had a dream. He dreamed He was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from His life. For each scene He noticed two sets of footprints in the sand. One belonging to Him and the other to the LORD.
 - When the last scene of His life flashed before Him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of His life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of His life.
 - This really bothered Him and He questioned the LORD about it. LORD you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the

- way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.
- o The LORD replied, "My precious, I Love you and I would never leave you! During your times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."
- It's here we find the centre or main point of the psalm
- The reason that David finds peace and contentment and joy and comfort ...
 is because the presence of God
 - o God is with him ... in the good times, in the hard times
 - And David finds comfort in knowing the Lord is there within him every step of the way

• Jesus - the good shepherd

- This can all seem a little fanciful and idealistic ... especially if you are going through hard times right now
- However, this Lord as our shepherd suddenly gets very real and very personal for us ... when we remember that Jesus says in John 10:11
 - o I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
- You see Jesus is saying ... HE is the good shepherd
 - o The shepherd king of Ps 23 is Christ himself
 - And the reason we know
 - he is good
 - loves his sheep
 - cares for his sheep
 - o is because not only does he lead, guide and protect his sheep ... but he actually lays down his life for his sheep
- And it is in the laying down of his life for his sheep ... that Jesus is able to give us the peace and contentment and joy we so desperately need and want
 - Because it's in the laying down of his life on the cross, that Jesus wins you and I forgiveness of sin and restored relationship with our Father in heaven
 - o It's because Christ was the good shepherd who protected you from the enemies of sin, Satan and eternal death ... that you shall not be in want when it comes to facing God's judgment

- In other words ... he restores your soul
- He does this in two ways
 - o First is that he restores your soul with God¹
 - You've heard of the emergency code SOS
 - That's what the good shepherd has done in laying down his life ... he's saved our souls
 - Because what ultimately matters is not physical comfort ... but our spiritual restoration
 - o Second way he restores your soul ...
 - He brings you peace and contentment and joy
 - Because when you know the good shepherd and you trust and follow him ... it means you have
 - nothing to fear
 - nothing to be anxious of
 - nothing to search for
 - Because it's been taken care of for you by your good shepherd
- And friends, when you walk through those dark days that feel like you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death ... you can know that the good shepherd himself knows exactly what you are going through
 - o Because while you and I may walk through that valley of darkness
 - $\circ\hspace{0.1in}$ Jesus life came to an end in that valley
- And the reason Jesus can walk alongside you and I in the valley of dark days ... and where necessary ... carry you and I in our weakness, and brokenness and sinfulness ... is because he's walked it himself ... and he came through the other side
 - Death could not hold him down
 - It had no power over him
- Only the Lord can lead you through death
 - o As one commentators says ... "all other guides turn back" when they come to death
 - But not Christ
 - He went through it ... and came out the others side and therefore he is able to lead you throughthe darkest of days ... even death itself

¹1 Peter 2:25 - For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

- Over the couple of weeks, I've numerous conversations with people who are going through hard times
- It struck me how relevant Psalm 23 is to us today
 - o There will always be things that make life hard ...
 - o There will always be time when we go through dark days
- Whether it be
 - Suffering
 - Persecution
 - Anxiety
 - Grief
 - o Betrayal
 - o Guilt
 - Hardship
- Often when we go through difficult times like these we yearn for comfort to take our mind of it and ease our pain
- It might be the comfort of
 - Alcohol
 - Intimacy and sex
 - Shopping
 - Food
 - Gaming
 - o Drugs
- And if you've ever turned to those things to escape the pain of what you are going through ... you'll know
 - they never satisfy
 - o they'll often leave you feeling worse
 - o and even if they do satisfy for a time ... it's all short lived, because as soon as your time of comfort ends ... the pain and darkness is still there
- But what Psalm 23 points us to is ... is the real comfort we have is in Christ and his assured presence with us
- That is in Christ ... you shall not want
 - $\circ\ \ \mbox{For}$... all we truly need is found in him
 - Love and intimacy that no one can match
 - A restoring of the soul that no holiday can provide
 - A peace of mind that no drug can give us
- For in those moments of darkness ... true comfort is knowing the Shepherd-King is walking right beside you

Psalm 23 Songs of Christ 15th Apr 2018

3. Comfort for the future

- The Lord's presence not only brings us comfort for the here and now ... but Lord's presence also brings us comfort for the future
- And David recognised this in v5-6
- For in these verses he speaks of the great blessing that comes to those who follow the good shepherd ...
 - The picture is of a guest being welcomed into a king's palace for a great banquet ...
 - Where all manner of choice foods have been prepared
 - Where they are given hair gel to fix up their hair
 - Where the Penfolds Grange never runs out
- These metaphors of a great banquet ... anointing with oil ... and an overflowing cup ... give us the picture of the wonderful welcome and lavish provision God pours out on those who come to him
 - Banquet
 - As in most cultures, being invited to eat with someone, especially invited to a banquet is a mark of fellowship and friendship
 - In addition, throughout the NT, heaven is portrayed like a great banquet
 - Parable of Great banquet (Luke 14:16ff)
 - Parable of Lost Son (Luke 15:24-32)
 - To eat with the Lord is to be in fellowship and covenant with the Lord (e.g. like the disciples at the Last Supper)
 - So to be a guest at the Lord's table is to be more than an acquaintance invited for the day, it is to live with him
 - Anointing with oil
 - Anointing the head with oil was a customary way of welcoming honoured guests
 - o Overflowing Cup
 - In the OT ... the cup often described in two ways
 - First is as a cup of wrath poured out on those who are God's enemies
 - Second way, which fits the context of Ps 23 ... is it is a cup of blessing or the cup salvation²
 - Here David says this cup the Lord gives him is overflowing ...
 - overflowing with blessing and
 - overflowing with salvation

²Psalm 116:!3

- These two verses are describing the experience that David knows he'll receive at the hand of his shepherd-king as he is welcomed into the presence of the Lord
 - It's a picture of peace, and joy and blessing and salvation as he 'dwells in the house of the Lord forever'

Application

- If any of you have ever been involved in a wedding you'll know one of the most stressful parts of planning a wedding is working out the guest list
- Who will get to go to the wedding and who will miss out
 - Should your third cousin's boyfriend come?
 - o What about mum's friend pen pal from US who she hasn't seen 35 yrs?
- Even worse is when a family member or friend announces they're getting married and wondering ... whether or not you'll get invited!
- The event of eternity is coming up
 - o And the question is ... will you be there?
 - Do you have the comfort of knowing you will experience the heavenly banquet that David is describing here in Psalm 23?
- The answer to that question comes from the good shepherd himself
 - o John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.
- If you want the comfort both now and forever that comes from knowing the Lord as your shepherd ...
 - Well you need to hear his voice and follow him
 - You need to hear his call to you ... listen to his word ... and follow the one who will give you the comfort your desire
- For those who listen to and follow the good shepherd ... then when it comes to the event of eternity ...
 - o There's no doubt as to whether you'll be there or not
 - o You're in!
 - You have a seat at the table
 - o You will be part of the heavenly banquet hosted by the Lord Jesus Christ
- This is the great hope that the gospel gives us
 - No matter what life throws your way ... there is a victory banquet ready and waiting for you to attend

- Where the cup you drink from will be overflowing ...
- And the reason you and I can drink the cup of salvation that is overflowing with blessing ... is because Jesus drank the cup of wrath that was overflowing with judgment
- You see that?
 - o Because Jesus drank from the cup of wrath
 - o You and I can drink from the cup of blessing
- That means friends ... that you and I have no need to fear
 - And we can be confident that we will share in the great blessing of that eternal banquet Psalm 23 points us to

4. Conclusion

- Can you say with King David ... the Lord is MY shepherd?
- Do you listen to his voice and follow him?
- Because if you do ... you have
 - o the comfort of knowing Jesus for the now
 - o the comfort of knowing Jesus for the future
- For when you listen the voice of Jesus ... and follow him
 - o Not only are you assured of your invitation to the heavenly banquet
- You're also assured of
 - o never lacking anything that the Shepherd thinks is good for you
 - $\circ\hspace{0.4cm}$ knowing Jesus walks beside you through your darkest days
 - o he provides true comfort in the midst of your darkness
- So this year ... will you look to Jesus
 - o for all that you need ...
 - o for the comfort you desire
- Will you trust him to deliver on what he has promised?
- For if you say The Lord is my shepherd ... you can be sure of his presence with you both now and for eternity
- And so you can say with Paul ... that in Christ your Shepherd-King these words are true for you
 - o **Romans 8:37-39** ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

• There is NOTHING in all creation ... NOT EVEN DEATH ... can separate us from God ... for those who call upon Jesus as Lord

PRAY