

What I want to say this morning, the first in this series, speaks to the heart of the matter: “Your Needs and God’s Provision.”

Through the six verses of this psalm, again and again, we are made aware of God’s provision for our needs.

God meets your every need: Your need for nourishment as God provides us with ‘green pastures’; rest, as we are led by ‘still waters’; refreshment for the spirit as God ‘restores my soul’...

Companionship, ‘though I walk through the valley of the darkest shadows’; your need for protection, ‘your rod and your staff, they comfort me’.

More than we need is provided, ‘my cup overflows’; and best of all, God gives us hope, ‘I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever’.

From beginning to end, birth to death and beyond, again and again and again this psalm assures us that God provides, always and forever providing for your needs.

First, note that God’s motive for providing for us is that God cares!

The most dramatic image of God in the Old Testament is “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

A shepherd is one who cares for her sheep, protects them because she cares about them, leads them to nourishing grass and refreshing streams because she cares about their well-being.

Martin Luther said it this way, “God does not love us because we are valuable. We are valuable because God loves us.”

One of the most unfortunate things we ever allowed to happen to the Christian faith and to the image of God was to have God portrayed as a wet blanket dropped on every joyful impulse.

Too many people have a picture of God that sees only the wrath of a vindictive God.

Some years ago, I was visiting a young family in their home. The ten-year-old son sat with his parents, but his six-year-old sister was just full of herself!

I didn’t pay much attention to it, a young child being a young child. But it bothered her mother, who told her, “You sit still and be a little lady, and you be quiet.” The little girl wasn’t about to.

But then her mother dumped some very bad theology on the visit by saying, “If you’re not a good little girl, God is going to get you.”

That was bad, but it got worse, because she added, “And if God doesn’t, Rev. Lancaster will!”

Now I want to tell you that is not only a false picture of God, it’s a false picture of me! I’m a fairly nice guy; but even more, God cares, God loves us!

And because God loves us, that makes us somebody of great value, someone of great importance.

It makes me want to get up when I’m down, to try again when I’ve failed. It challenges me to love my neighbor as myself, to get closer to God, to love God back because God loves me so.

“Love so amazing,” says the old hymn, “so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.”

God’s motive for providing for your needs is that God loves you.

The second thing this 23rd Psalm teaches us is that God’s provisions are realistic.

Oswald Chambers said, “God is present now, dancing on the chaos of my life.” Isn’t that where a lot of us are and Psalm 23 wants us to know that God provides for us where we are.

We don't live Christian lives like plants in a greenhouse where the environment is controlled year-round.

Let me put it this way: Picture yourself in Kroger and you step up to the self-checkout line with a gallon of milk and a carton of eggs.

At one machine is a lady with two carts full of groceries, at another is a person having difficulty scanning his groceries and the clerk is helping him, the other is out of order, and the remaining kiosk only takes a card and all you have is cash.

You look over at the Express Lane for 15 or less items, and there is someone with three dump trucks full of groceries!

If Paul had been there, I'm not sure what he would have said about love being patient and kind!

It's hard to be Christian in that line, but that's the real world!

Psalm 23 is very clear, very honest about the world we live in:

- A world of death and disease or there would be no 'shadow of death' to face',
- We live in a world where enemies abound, or there would be no table set 'in the presence of my enemies',
- A world where exhaustion and fatigue can overwhelm us, or we would not need a place for the quietness of 'still waters',
- We live in a world where people do go hungry, or we would not need the food of 'green pastures',
- A world where there is spiritual burnout, or we would not need for our souls to be 'restored';
- We live in a world where there is corruption and evil, or there would be no need for 'paths of righteousness'.

Anatole France said, "The truth is that life is delicious *and* horrible, charming *and* bitter."

All that the psalmist is saying is that God is here with us, aware of the pressures of the real world when he provides for our needs.

God is not remote and unconcerned. God is near and responsive to our needs because God cares.

God provides for our needs because God loves us, and God provides for us in the real world in which we live.

And finally, what we learn from this psalm is that God's capacity to provide is utterly reliable.

A little girl was asked to recite the 23rd Psalm and got a little confused: "The Lord is my shepherd, he is everything I want!"

But she was wiser than she knew. God is everything we want, everything we need, always reliable.

I remember when I was about to graduate from Columbia Seminary nearly forty years ago, and I went to talk with some professors, not about theology or preaching, but about the day-to-day dealing with people in the church.

I'll never forget what one said, "Bruce, there will be days when you come home and want to give it all up because you let someone down; and there will be days you want to give it up because there are people who will let you down. But remember, God never will."

He was right, on all three counts: I have, people have; but God never has, no matter where we work or live or worship.

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he filled his backpack with Twinkies and Kool-Aid juice boxes and he started his journey.

But when he got to the park, he saw an old woman on a park bench. She was sitting there just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his backpack.

He was about to take a bite of a Twinkie, when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie.

She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a juice box.

Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating Twinkies and drinking juice boxes and smiling, but they never said a word.

As it got later in the afternoon, the boy realized he needed to get home for supper. He got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug.

She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy got home, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?"

He replied, "I sat on a park bench and had snacks with God."

And he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?"

She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God."

And she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

God meets us wherever we find ourselves and provides us with all we need.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.