

Sunday December 4th 2011 – GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd,

I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Beloved in the Lord, 25 years ago, here in St. John's Church, by the grace of God, I was ordained into the Holy Ministry. Today, 25 years later I testify and say to you: "Glory to God in the Highest!" To God and God alone, belongs all the glory, honour and praise. We have a beautiful Hymn in Latvian, written by Samuel Preiswerk, which states: The work Lord Jesus all is Yours, the work which we do, and because this work is Yours, it will flourish and remain.

The call, the work, the fruit, it all comes from God, and therefore we proclaim: "Glory to God in the Highest!"

The Apostle Paul stated ***"for in Him we live and move and exist," (Acts 17:28)***

Today as I reflect upon 25 years of service and ministry I cannot go past the 23rd Psalm. The very first sermon I ever preached just over 30 years ago was on this very Psalm. This Psalm has always been, and will always be my favourite.

May this Psalm speak to us afresh today. May it touch our hearts anew, and as we comprehend it's depths may we be motivated to cry out: "Glory to God in the Highest."

Let us begin by observing the opening words of this Psalm. "The Lord." There is only one true Lord, there is only one truth, there is only one way to God, there is life only in one; there is forgiveness of sins in one name only and that is The Lord Jesus Christ, The Son of Almighty God.

Throughout the last 25 years you have heard this truth over and over again, and for as long as God calls me to preach to you, you will hear this same truth, unadulterated, unchanged. I will not water down the truth.

Jesus clearly taught: ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6)***

The way to God has always been, and always will be The Lord Jesus Christ. Only His blood shed on the cross paid our sin debt and opened the way to the Father.

There is only one Gospel, and that is clearly stated by Jesus Himself:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” John 3:16-17

The Lord Jesus Christ is The Good Shepherd, who out of His abundant Grace and Love, poured out His blood on the cross for our salvation. On the third day – Easter morning – God raised Him from the dead, and now through the Holy Spirit, He abides in the hearts of those who believe in Him, who have received the Good News in faith, who have confessed and repented of their sins and accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour. Such a one can say: “The Lord is my Shepherd.”

He is not only our Shepherd, but He meets all our needs. I can clearly testify with David: ***“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. “***

I have experienced much over the last 25 years, but throughout it all I say: “Glory to God in the Highest!” I have never been in want of anything. I do not say this to exalt myself – may that never be – no I say it to testify to the grace and mercy of God. To Him be all the Glory, honour and praise!

Early in childhood, God impressed upon my heart these words of Jesus:

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6:33

When, at the tender age of 17, I felt the call of God on my life to become a pastor, I struggled with this very text. I was being lured by a lucrative career in electronics. A good salary, study opportunities, lots of perks.

Then one Sunday morning, our pastor stopped halfway through his sermon, looked down from the pulpit, pointed a finger at me and quoted Jesus words: ***“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Matthew 16:26***

I got the message loud and clear, and so began the journey across the Tasman that led to here.

Glory to God in the Highest!

This journey throughout the last 25 years has been in green pastures, and beside clear waters. God has refreshed me with His Word every single day. He has lead me in paths of righteousness, for His names sake. How can I not respond by shouting: Glory to God in the Highest!?"

In verses 4 and 5 of this Psalm, there is a change of tone. David writes:

**"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.**

Yes, there have been and still will be a fair share of valleys. Nobody leads life on the mountaintops all the time. Suffering, pain, death are all a part of life in a sinful fallen world. As a pastor I have baptised, confirmed, married a lot of people, but more than anything else, I have buried the dead. I have officiated at in excess of 700 funerals!

The valley of the shadow of death is not an unfamiliar place, in my experience, but I can say along with David: **I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

Glory to God in the Highest! He has always been and always will be with me.

David mentions enemies. Every true Christian pastor and for that matter Christian person, has enemies. If we are true and faithful to God's Word we will have enemies. Not everyone likes to hear the truth, and it is impossible to please everyone.

Paul wrote in Galatians, the following words that have been and will remain my guide:

"For am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. " Galatians 1:10

It has never been, and never will be, my job to speak to you words that are designed to please you, My God given mission is to faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God, always speaking the truth in love, but never watered down. Because of this there have been and no doubt will be opponents/enemies, but I leave that in God's hands.

To Him be Glory evermore, Glory to God in the Highest!

In closing David writes: **“Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

I must mention my dear mother who went to be with Jesus, when I was 16. She put me on the path of faith, she taught me to read God’s Word and to pray. She taught me the great Hymn: “Take Thou my hand and lead me, O’er life’s rough way, With Heavenly manna feed me from day to day, Without Thy grace and favour, I go astray, Take Thou my hand O saviour, Choose Thou my way!

Having prayed this prayer almost every day of my life since childhood, I can testify that goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and according to His promise, by His blood, I have an eternal home in Heaven. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore!

Glory to God in the Highest!

In closing, my beloved congregation, my heartfelt prayer for each one of you is that this beautiful Psalm would be also your personal testimony.

If you have not yet yielded your life in faith to Jesus, do it now, today. If you have, come to Him anew and renew your commitment to Him.

Live life that always glorifies God.

Glory to God in the Highest!

Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.