



river west church

The Right Path Vs. The Easy One

Psalm 23:3

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Your Life Turned Around – For What?

Psalm 23 is the shepherd Psalm. The power of the Psalm is how it combines the Name of the LORD with the imagery of shepherd and sheep. The first five words say it all. The LORD, Yahwey, the sovereign, eternal, almighty God – He is MY shepherd. What a profoundly comforting truth! Indeed, Psalm 23 is one of the most comforting passages in the whole bible. No doubt that's why it's also a universal favorite. But there's more than just comfort to be found in this Psalm.

In Verse 3, the Psalmist says, "He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

A restored soul sounds great! We hear those words and we think of times "burn out," or exhaustion. Sounds like Psalm 23 is promising some sort of a vacation cruise with God where we get our own spiritual spa work done. We get restored.

But the Hebrew points in a different direction. The word "restored" is a word that literally means "turned around." Of course this could mean turned around from burn out to renewal. But the word most often carries overtones of a turned around life; a life put back on track with God, now moving in the right direction – HIS direction!

This is one of the awesome promises of Psalm 23. God is actively at work to turn our lives around. This is way bigger than just emotional renewal for burned out people. And there's a reason God wants to do this work in our lives. It's a reason that goes beyond our own comfort or renewal.

Justice and the Heart of God

God turns our lives around so that He might lead us in paths of righteousness. Righteousness is one of the most important themes in the whole Bible. It's the word "tsedek" in the Hebrew. Sometimes it's translated with the word "righteousness," and sometimes it's translated with the word "justice." This is what God is all about: justice/righteousness. This word is a window into the heart of God and the mission of God. Check out these verses and look for the theme of justice/righteousness: Psalm 9:7-9; Psalm 45:6-7; Psalm 82:3-4; Hosea 10:12. Note that righteousness involves caring for the poor, oppressed, or powerless. The Pharisees used the idea of "righteousness" as a way to promote their own pride and put other people down. But they got it wrong.

God cares deeply about justice/righteousness. There is a right way, a just way. But we are living in a sinful world in which the just ways of God are perverted or ignored. Injustice is everywhere.

Do you realize that God intends to put you on the path of justice/righteousness? That's why He turns your life around. Do you know what it means to be led in paths of righteousness/justice?

The Right Path, Not the Easy One

Psalm 23 is filled with comfort. But it's also filled with difficulties; things like the "valley of the shadow of death," "evil," and "enemies." Psalm 23 does not describe the easy life. It describes a difficult life that is lived in relationship with the Good Shepherd. The comfort of Psalm 23 is not escapism or

denial. It certainly doesn't promise you "your best life now," or the fulfillment of all your hopes, dreams, and longings. Instead it promises that God will turn your life around and lead you into a life of righteousness/justice in a sinful world. But that means you will have enemies and tough times. Jesus said His followers would be persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10). Why? Because Jesus leads them in paths of justice/righteousness and that makes them different. It makes them the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13).

Jesus leads us in the right paths, not the easy ones.

We have a great problem in the Christian community these days. We think God's primary job is to keep us happy and well adjusted in life. We see Psalms like Psalm 23 as a promise that God is going to renew us and make us happy and fulfill all our longings. But in reality, God is telling us He's going to change our hearts so we care less about ourselves and more about His mission of righteousness/justice in a broken world. His great promise is that He will be with us every step of the way – guiding, protecting and empowering us!

Pray about this. How is God leading you today? Remember, it's not just about you!