

Title: “Our Daily Bread”**[Slide 1]****Text: Psalm 23****Psalm 23:**

The Psalm that we are going to look at this morning is Psalm 23. Let’s stand and read it together:

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The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

he refreshes my soul.

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*He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.*

*Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

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*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

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*Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

Desert

California, 2015:

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In California's Sierra Nevada Mountains it's supposed to snow – a lot! The words "Sierra Nevada" mean "Snowy Range." A look at the record book tells why:

- Highest one day snowfall: 67" (2nd in U.S.)
- Highest single storm: 15.6' (2nd in U.S.)
- Highest month snowfall: 32.5'
- Highest total winter snowfall: 73.7'

But this past winter it didn't happen. By spring the snowpack was 5% of average. On April 2nd Governor Jerry Brown stood on bare ground where there were supposed to be 5 feet of snow and announced the most severe water restrictions in California's history. Reservoirs were already disastrously low, and with no snow in the mountains they would not be replenished. Millions of Californians were beginning to come to terms with what it means to live in the desert.

Exodus:

The Bible tells the story of God and His rescue of His Creation. Most of all, it tells the story of how God rescues and restores human beings who He created to be His reflection and rulers in His world.

At the very heart of the story is that great journey from slavery to freedom called "The Exodus." The Exodus is the story of a long trek through the desert. The terrain between the starting point in Egypt and the destination in what is now Israel is a wasteland of sand and rock, mountains and ravines. It is aptly called the Sinai Desert.

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Can you imagine what it must have felt like to leave behind the garden landscape of the Nile River delta and walk out into the blazing heat of the Sinai Desert? No towns, no markets, no rivers, gardens or pastures. The next oasis might be days away. And how would you know which way to go in such a trackless waste? No wonder the wandering Israelites were so prone to fear and grumbling!

But they were not alone. Every step of the way – over a time span of 40 years – God went before them. Every day he provided for their needs. What must have seemed like aimless wandering and mere survival was actually a journey from the old to the new, from death to life, from slavery to freedom. That was the Exodus Journey.

The New Normal:

In announcing draconian water restrictions for Californians, Governor Brown warned that this drought was the "new normal." As far as he could tell, the desert was back and it was here to stay.

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We can feel that way when we find ourselves in a "desert experience." Our reservoirs are dried up. A long, hot summer of trials and neediness looms before us. In times like that we may very well feel like all we can do is adjust to wandering in a desert; it's our "new normal."

At times like that God's Word shouts loud and clear that He, not the desert around us, is *our New Normal*. He is calling us to journey *through* the desert to the New Life that He alone has for us. We're invited to be on His Exodus Journey.

An Exodus Song

A song of the Shepherd:

Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm, is a song about the New Normal of our Exodus journey.

Its opening words -- "The LORD is my shepherd" -- anchor us in the Exodus Story. Psalm 80 begins by making the same connection:

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Psalm 80:1 NIV

*Hear us, **Shepherd of Israel**,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.*

Think of it: David is saying that the God who created the heavens and the earth is *his personal Shepherd* in his desert journey! "The LORD is *my Shepherd*..." The desert may seem trackless and empty; the journey may seem dangerous and without any purpose. But the Shepherd knows what He is doing. And He is *my Shepherd*.

A song of provision:

Deserts are, by definition, places of extreme neediness. Deserts are places where there's no water, no food, no path. But when the Shepherd leads us, He meets all of our needs. This was Israel's experience on her Exodus Journey. When they had reached the Promised Land Moses reminded the people:

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Deuteronomy 2:7 NIV

*The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not **lacked** anything.*

David uses the same word as Moses to describe God's provision of every need:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I **lack** nothing.*

The Shepherd provides:

- **Food for the journey:** green pastures in the midst of the barren wastes, just as God provided manna and quail for Israel in the desert.
- **Still waters:** an oasis in the parched landscape, just as God provided water from the rock in the desert.
- **A path through the wilderness:** “paths of righteousness,” the right path in every situation, no matter how confusing, just as God led His people with the cloud and the pillar of fire in the desert.
- **Protection in the darkest times:** He goes before us in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, protecting and comforting us all along the way, just as God protected them in times of battle and disease in the desert.

A song of plenty:

And it is right there – in the darkest moment of the song – that David sings the song of plenty:

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

*Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

David describes a great banquet in God’s House.

- The table is filled with the finest of foods.
- The guests have their heads anointed with oil before taking their places – the tradition of hospitality in that time.
- Their cups are filled to overflowing with the finest of wines.
- The banquet celebrates the secure, covenant relationship between them and their King; His goodness and covenant faithfulness pursue them “all the days” of their lives.

This is not just a banquet that we await in the future. It is a banquet that happens *right now, in the presence of our enemies*. As Paul wrote to the Philippian church:

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Philippians 4:19 NIV

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

“Our daily bread”

The Holy Spirit Shepherd:

So how do we experience God’s leading and provision in our lives? How does David’s song become our daily reality? Isaiah points the way for us as he retells the Exodus Story for the people of his own day. Like us, they needed the Shepherd to lead them through the desert to the Father’s House. Isaiah imagines remembering the Exodus, then asking:

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Isaiah 63:11b-14 NIV

*...where is he who brought them through the sea,
with the shepherd of his flock?*

Where is he who set

his Holy Spirit among them,

¹² who sent his glorious arm of power

to be at Moses’ right hand,

who divided the waters before them,

to gain for himself everlasting renown,

¹³ who led them through the depths?

Like a horse in open country,

they did not stumble;

¹⁴ like cattle that go down to the plain,

they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD.

This is how you guided your people

to make for yourself a glorious name.

The Shepherd was His Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who divided the Red Sea, who led them and gave them rest. "This is how you guided your people."

Led by the Spirit:

The same Holy Spirit was present to lead God's people on the New Exodus Journey after Jesus died and rose again. His death was the new Passover. His resurrection was the new parting of the Red Sea. And His Spirit is now present to lead His people through the desert to the Promised Land.

We live out Psalm 23 through our relationship with the Holy Spirit. He is the one who nourishes us and restores our souls. He is the one who shows us the path to take. He brings the presence of Jesus in the dark valleys. He sets the table in the wilderness and anoints our heads with His presence and power. He is the Comforter. It is only through Him that we know God's goodness and love.

"Our daily bread"

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Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." As with the other parts of the Lord's Prayer, this is an Exodus request. Our "new normal" requires God's provision for our desert needs! Just as God provided manna in the desert for Israel, He will provide "green pastures" in the desert for us. But first we must welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives and learn to hear His voice. When He is present, He reveals Jesus – the Good Shepherd – to us. And when we follow the Shepherd, we find we have everything we need.