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Sermon

Yahweh, our healer is here to help and bring victory

Psalm 23 - Part 5

Exodus 15:22-27; Psalm 23

19th September 2021

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We have been exploring Psalm 23 over some weeks now. David, to whom this Psalm is attributed, likened God to his shepherd and used that metaphor to illustrate God's care for his people. Immediately, there is the title of God: *Yahweh-Ra-ah* my shepherd, and there follow many expressions of God's character in the psalm which are matched titles of God.

Names and titles tell us about people. Especially in Biblical times when a person's name was not just a label as we might see it, but considered to be descriptive of the person's character. How much more so with God.

Verse 3 says, "He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The way he leads and deals with his people matters because it affects and indeed builds his reputation. How can we know what he is like except by his actions?

The names and titles of God are 'windows' through which we come to 'see' his character more clearly. Some titles were revealed when there was a crisis in which a particular attribute was brought into focus. Then God was named with that particular title. These titles reveal both character and our relationship with God. We have already explored the relationships of Shepherd and Provider. These give us confidence in how God relates to us and that he is the solution for our problems. The knowledge of God's names helps us turn to him confidently in our crises.

Psalm 9:10 reads: "Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you."

"Those who know your name will trust in you." As we know our God we grow in our trust of him. Knowing his names and what they signify helps us grow in that trust.

In the previous sermon, we explored *Yahweh Yireh* – our provider and *Yahweh Shalom* – our peace and that these were referenced in the first two verses: "I shall not want" and "He leads me by still waters."

There are eight more referenced in Psalm 23. Today I will explore four of those which I have grouped by association rather than verse order. *Yahweh Rapha* – *Yahweh* healer; *Yahweh Shamma* = *Yahweh* who is present; *Yahweh Ezer* = *Yahweh* my help; *Yahweh Nissi* = *Yahweh* my standard.

Yahweh Raphe

In Psalm 23:3 we read, “He restores my soul.” Restoring the soul is facet of healing. A title God declared of himself is *Yahweh-Rapha*— “I am the Lord who heals you.” When the Israelites had crossed out of Egypt, they travelled in the desert. After three days with no water supply they came to a spring. But it was bitter water! The people grumbled against Moses but God showed him a piece of wood to throw into the spring which made its waters sweet. Then he promised:

Exodus 15:26 "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

There it is: *Yahweh, Rapha*.

As an aside, some people argue that we should only pray for healing and not use medicines. It is worth noting that on this occasion when God actually named himself as healer, he had just shown Moses a type of wood to throw into the water to take away the bitterness. Now we could say it was a miracle accompanied by a symbolic action of throwing the wood in or we might say that the wood was the active agent. Whichever it was, this account does rather validate a medical approach under God’s guidance. In my view we should pray and use the medical means available to us – neglecting neither avenue.

In Psalm 103, we read,

Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- who forgives all your sins and- heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion ...

It wasn’t only the water that was bitter – so was the attitude of the Israelites! Is there in you, any bitterness towards God or any other? Let him restore peace and health to your soul.

In Psalm 23, healing appears in the words, “he restores my soul.” I wonder if you could think of this time of lockdown as a time to allow God to restore your soul? Without some of the normal demands of life, this could be a time to seek God and find rest for your soul. For some it increases stress especially financial concerns – if that is you, seek to put your confidence in his role of provider and allow him to restore your soul.

Yahweh Shama

“I will fear no evil for you are with me.” When God commissioned Moses at the burning bush, he reassured Moses, “I will be with you.” Isaiah announced a title of the Messiah, *Emmanuel* which means God with us. But the formal title we are concerned with now, comes from the end of Ezekiel’s vision of the new Jerusalem. It is *Yahweh-Shama*—*Yahweh* is there. Like some other titles, it was given to a place – this time the New Jerusalem, yet it speaks of the attribute of God being present.

We also need to know God is with us, and so have courage in our dark valleys. Jesus promised, “I am with you always (or every day).” Can you hold tightly to that promise, that *Yahweh-Shama*, the Lord who is there, is with you at all times?

The Letter to the Hebrews states “He will never leave you or forsake you.”¹ In fact, the Greek of that verse has three negatives: He will never, never, never leave you or forsake you. That is a strong, stronger, strongest promise! Put your confidence in the Living God who is always with you – everyday – right now! You are not alone.

Psalm 46 has the expression God is “a very present help.” The Hebrew for this expression says something like “help which can found when you need it.”² And this is provides a good connection to our next name: the Lord our help.

¹ Hebrews 13:6

² Wilson G.H., 2002, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms Vol 1*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p716

Yahweh Ezer

The title, *Yahweh Ezer*, comes from Psalm 33:20 where the Psalmist wrote: We wait in hope for the LORD, our help and our shield." He is *Yahweh-Ezer* - my Help. We have already explored the rod and the staff in a previous sermon. These are the tools by which the shepherd helps the flock: defending, directing and rescuing his sheep.

Many times through scripture, God is called the helper. In Hebrews 13:6, we read, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."

I came across this account of the Lord's help in the late 18th century.

The citizens of Feldkirch in Austria, didn't know what to do. Napoleon's army was preparing to attack. So a council of citizens was hastily summoned to decide whether they should try to defend themselves or surrender. It happened to be Easter Sunday, and the people had gathered in the local church.

The pastor rose and said, "Friends, we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed. As this is the day of our Lord's resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our services as usual, and leave the matter in His hands." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden peal, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the service ended, the enemy broke camp and left.

There are several similar stories from the Old Testament where overwhelming enemies were turned away as a result of prayer. One such comes in the time of Samuel as recorded in 1 Samuel 7:1-13. The Philistines had been oppressing Israel for over 20 years. Samuel called the nation to repent from worship of other gods and to be committed to Yahweh.

Then he called them to an assembly where they fasted and confessed their sins. On hearing that they had gathered together, the Philistines came to attack them and they were afraid. So Samuel led them in worship and prayer and scripture says, "The LORD answered him." Isn't that what you want in distress? As the Philistines came close to attack, we are told,

... the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. [v10b]

Now these are battle-hardened warriors – it's not as if they were toddlers running to mummy. Somehow, this loud thunder literally put the fear of God into them and they fled before the Israelites and "so the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. [v13]"

The Lord helped Israel. And we read in verse 12,

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up ... He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us."

Eben is Hebrew for stone; *ezer* for help; so *Ebenezer* means stone of help. Samuel set up a stone to commemorate the help God had given them. When we see a statue or a memorial it is intended to remind us of a person or an event. You drive past the Silverdale Rugby club, there is the memorial to the war dead from that area. When you see it, you are reminded of those who died. If you go to Mercury Bay you may see this concrete memorial. It is a marker which draws your attention to a past event. The inscription reads, "Near this spot on 10 November 1769 James Cook and Charles Green observed the transit of Mercury to determine the longitude of the bay."



We sang the hymn, "Come Thou fount of every blessing" earlier. The second verse reads:

Here I raise mine Ebenezer, hither by thy help, I'm come.
And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.

Now we have learnt the significance of the word "Ebenezer." It was a memorial of God's help. So more prosaically the verse is saying,

Here I put up a memorial that I have come so far by your help.
And I hope, in your mercy to get home safely to heaven.

When you know God has helped you, it is good to record that. Later you can look back on it and be encouraged rather than just forget that the Lord helped..

If you are in a difficult time, can you make the choice to call out to God for help and then to trust him finding comfort from him? Faith is an act of the will not of emotion. You will never have faith by waiting for the feeling of trust. It is a decision to trust the facts about God and what he has promised. Then the feelings will follow.

Well, we have considered a series of associated titles of God: The Healer, Who is present, and who is our Help. The fourth is Our Standard.

Yahweh-Nissi

He is *Yahweh-Nissi*—The Lord, my standard.

There is the battle reported in Exodus 17, when the Amalekites attacked the Israelites during the wilderness wandering. Moses went to the top of the hill overlooking the battleground while Joshua led the defenders. Moses had his staff - the Rod of God. He had used it when he worked the miracles in Egypt, when he parted the Red Sea and when he struck the rock to bring forth water. They found that when he raised the rod up, the Israelites prevailed in battle. When he let the rod down, the Amalekites were winning. The battle continued through the day but of course Moses couldn't hold his arms up for long. So his brother Aaron and Hur who were with him, supported his arms all day until the battle was won. Then Moses heard God tell him to write this story down so it would be remembered. "Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. He said, 'For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD.'"³

It is similar to the previous account from Samuel. Again there is a memorial of God's help. On this occasion, Moses called the altar, *Yahweh Nissi*, *Yahweh* my standard. A standard in war is a rallying point and encouragement for soldiers. So he was saying God had done that through Moses' prayer and staff. God had saved them from their enemies.

In Psalm 23, the Shepherd prepared a table for David in the presence of his enemies. Just as the name *Yahweh-Nissi* denotes a victory standard, here he is safe and protected in the presence of his enemies. This is victory.

And so in these names and their outworking we have the assurance of God's constant presence with us; the help available when needed, his healing and his victory in the battles of life.

We are in trying times. Some struggle with lockdown. One of our older parishioners helpfully called it "cabin fever." As we face whatever stresses this outbreak may be bringing us, let us take hold of our God's hand.

- If we face sickness or disease, let us put ourselves in the care of the Great Physician— *Yahweh-Rapha*, "The LORD who heals."
- If we find ourselves in need, let us reach out for *Yahweh-Ezer*, the Lord our helper.
- Wherever we are, remember *Yahweh-Shammah*, "The LORD is there."
- In our battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil, it is essential to keep our eye on *Yahweh -Nissi*, "The LORD our Banner."

Amen.

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³ Exodus 17:15-16