

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: April 8th: Psalm 23

Here's a sample...

The Lord is Like My Probation Officer... Psalm 23

The Lord is like my Probation Officer, He will help me, He tries to help me make it every day.

He makes me play it cool And feel good inside of me. He shows me the right path

So I'll have a good record, And he'll have one too. Because I trust him, And that ain't easy,

I don't worry too much about What's going to happen. Just knowing he cares about Me helps me.

He makes sure I have my food And that Mom fixes it He helps her stay sober And that makes me feel good All over. He's a good man, I think, And he is kind; And these things will stay

With me. And when I'm kind and good Then I know the Lord Is with me like the Probation Officer.

.God is for Real, Man, by Carl F. Burke, Chaplain of Erie County Jail, Buffalo, New York; Association Press, New York; 1966 by National Board of Young Men's Christian Association.

The 23rd Psalm, along with the Lord's Prayer, comes into the "everybody knows it" category, though of course everybody doesn't know it. It is used for both weddings and funerals, partly because so many people asked to choose a Bible passage will know this one – both the words, in whole or in part, and, significantly, the actual Bible reference. (Very few of those who "know" the Lord's Prayer could quote the chapter and verse.) There are numerous translations and numerous settings, but the psalm is unique not only in its popularity, but also (and part of the popularity) but also in having at least three very beautiful settings: Crimond, Brother James' Air, and what might be called the TV version ("Vicar of Dibley").by Howard Goodall.

The psalm is about God as shepherd, and about God as host. The shepherd theme is a common Biblical theme: God as shepherd, church leaders as shepherds/pastors on behalf of God. But, usually, the shepherd imagery is about the collective flock. In the 23rd Psalm, it is about the individual sheep: a special theme that Jesus picked up in what He said about "the lost sheep" This is all the more important because "sheep" are nowadays very much seen as an anonymous flock, in which individuals really don't count for much..

This isn't a psalm about the necessarily naive trust of a child, but the measured trust of an adult who knows about hunger, getting lost, and gloomy valleys. The one perhaps discordant note is that the enjoyment of what we normally hear as the "banquet" (and the Message version calls "a six course meal") is enhanced by the fact that the hungry enemy is looking on enviously. Personally, I feel a bit guilty if I am having a good meal, and someone looking hungry is outside.

The Probation Officer version was prompted by a desire to get across to 20th Century young inner city offenders, who weren't easily persuaded by references to sheep. But the attempt shows how hard it is

to find an alternative picture for those who are unaware of the realities of Bible shepherding – including fighting off bears, etc.



