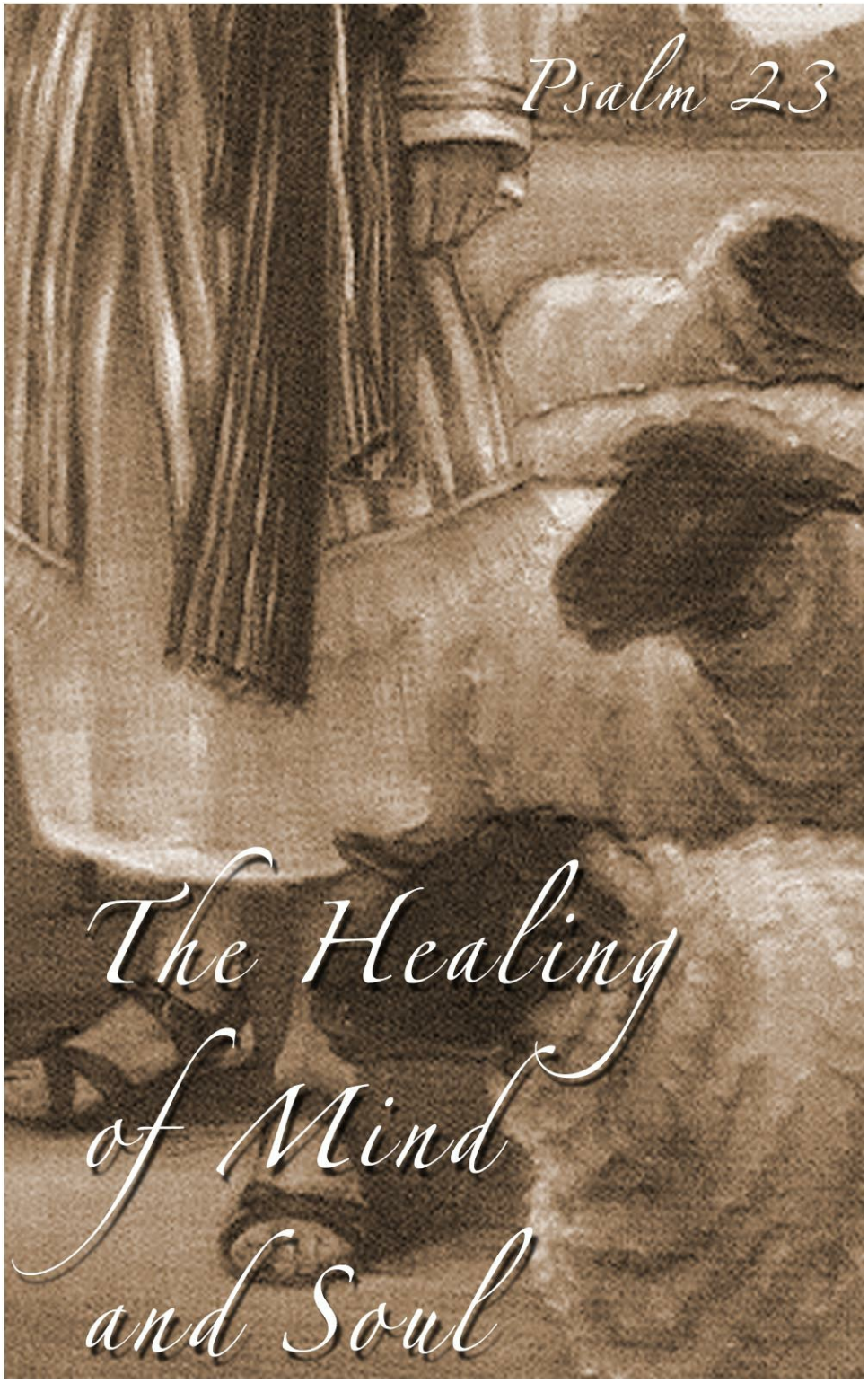
Psalm 23
The Healing
of Mind
and Soul

Psalm 23:16

A Psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

A PATTERN OF THINKING

Our modern ward "psychiatry" comes from two Greek words that mean (1) "soul" or "mind" and (2) "treatment" or "healing." Together they mean, "the healing of the mind," or, as David might have said, "the restoring of the soul." And only God can heal the soul.

So, the first and most important psychiatry must be God's psychiatry, the essence of which I find contained in the bestknown passages of the Bible.

A man I admired came in to see me. Many years ago he started with his company at the bottom, but with determination to get to the top. He has unusual abilities and energy and he used all he had. Today he is president of his company and he has all the things that go with his position.

Yet, along the way, he left out something, and one of the things he did not achieve is happiness. He was a nervous, tense, worried and sick man. Finally, his physician suggested that he talk with a minister.

We talked of how his physician had given him prescriptions and he had taken them. Then I took a sheet of paper and wrote out my prescription for him. I prescribed the Twentythird Psalm, five times a day for seven days.

I insisted that he take it just as I prescribed. He was to read it the first thing when he awakened in the morning. Read it carefully, meditatively, and prayerfully after breakfast, lunch, again after dinner, and, finally, the last thing before he went to bed.

It was not to be a quick, hurried reading. He was to think about each phrase, giving his mind time to soak up as much of the meaning as possible. At the end of just one week, I promised, things would be different for him.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." Marcus Aurelius said, "A man's life is what his thoughts make it." The Bible says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).

The Twentythird Psalm is a pattern of thinking, and when a mind becomes saturated with it, a new way of thinking and a new life are the result. It contains only 118 words. One could memorize it in a short time. In fact, most of us already know it. But its power is not in memorizing the words, but rather in thinking the thoughts.

The power of this Psalm lies in the fact that it represents a positive, hopeful, and faithful approach to life. We assume it was written by David, the same David who had a black chapter of sin and failure in his life. But he spends no time in useless regret and morbid looking back.

Take the Twentythird Psalm as I prescribe, and in seven days a powerful new way of thinking will be deeply and firmly implanted within your mind that will bring marvelous changes in your thinking and give you a new life.

1. "The Lord Is My Shepard; I Shall Not Want."

Immediately after World War Two, the Allied Armies gathered up many hungry, homeless children and placed them in large camps. There the children were abundantly fed and cared for. However, at night they did not sleep well. They seemed restless and afraid.

Finally, a psychologist hit on a solution. After the children were put to bed, they each received a slice of bread to hold. If they wanted more to eat, more was provided, but this particular slice was not to be eaten—it was just to hold. The slice of bread produced marvelous results. The child would go to sleep; subconsciously feeling it would have something to eat tomorrow. That assurance gave the child a calm and peaceful rest.

In the Twentythird Psalm, David points out something of the same feeling in the sheep when he says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Instinctively, the sheep knows the shepherd has made plans for its grazing tomorrow. It knows the shepherd made ample provision for it today, so will he tomorrow. So the sheep lies down in its fold with, figuratively speaking, the piece of bread in its hand.

This Psalm does not begin with a petition asking God for something; rather it is a calm statement of fact—"The Lord is my shepherd." We do not have to beg God for things.

Paul writes, "My God shall supply all your need" (Philippians 4:19). David puts it, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." With that faith we can work today without worrying about tomorrow.

2."He Maketh Me To Lie Down In Green Pasture."

A pastor by the name of Charles shared this with me.

"One morning as I was hurriedly dressing to begin a full and thrilling day, I felt a pain in my back. I mentioned it to my wife but was sure it would soon pass away. However, she insisted I see a physician, and he put me in a hospital. In the hospital I was very unhappy. I had no time to be wasting there in bed. My

calendar was full of good activities and the doctor had told me to cancel all my appointments for at least a month. A dear minister friend of mine came to see me. He sat down and very firmly said, "Charles, I have only one thing to say to you—'He maketh me to lie down.'"

I lay there thinking about those words in the Twentythird Psalm long after my friend had gone. I thought about how the shepherd starts the sheep grazing about 4 o'clock in the morning. The sheep walk steadily as they graze; they are never still."

By 10 o'clock, the sun is beaming down and the sheep are hot, tired and thirsty. The wise shepherd knows that the sheep must not drink when it is hot, neither when its stomach is filled with undigested grass.

So the shepherd makes the sheep lie down in green pastures, in a cool, soft spot. The sheep will not eat lying down, so it chews its cud, which is nature's way of digestion.

Study the lives of great people, and you will find every one of them drew apart from the hurry of life for rest and reflection. Great poems are not written on crowded streets, lovely songs are not written in the midst of clamoring multitudes; our visions of God come when we stop. The Psalmist said, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

Sometimes God puts us on our backs in order to give us a chance to look up: "He maketh me to lie down." Many times we are forced, not by God, but by circumstances of one sort or another to lie down. That can always be a blessed experience. Even the bed of an invalid may be a blessing if he takes advantage of it!

3. "He Leadeth Me Beside The Still Waters."

The sheep is a very timid creature. Especially is it afraid of swiftly moving water, which it has good reason to fear.

The sheep is a very poor swimmer because of its heavy coat of wool. It would be like a man trying to swim with his overcoat on. The water soaks into the sheep's coat and pulls it down.

Instinctively, the sheep knows it cannot swim in swift current. The sheep will not drink from a moving stream. The sheep will drink only from still waters.

The shepherd does not laugh at the sheep's fears. He does not try to force the sheep. Instead, as he leads his sheep across the mountains and valleys, he is constantly on the watch for still waters, where the thirst of the sheep may be quenched.

If there are no still waters available, while the sheep are resting, the shepherd will gather up stones to fashion a dam across a small stream to form a pool from which even the tiniest lamb may drink without fear.

This petition of the Twentythird Psalm has wonderful meaning for us. God knows our limitations, and He does not condemn us because we have weaknesses. He does not force us where we cannot safely and happily go. God never demands of us work, which is beyond our strength and abilities.

Instead, God is constantly ministering to our needs. He understands the loads upon our shoulders. He also knows where the places of nourishment and refreshment are located.

It gives one confidence to know that even while he is sleeping, the Shepherd is working to prepare for his needs tomorrow.

One of the finest ways to relieve a tension in your life is to picture still water clearly in your mind. Maybe picture a little lake nestled among some pines. Or consider a tiny, cool spring on some hillside. Maybe a calm sea with gentle, rippling waves.

After the picture becomes clear, then start repeating and believing, "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Such an experience produces a marvelous surrender and trust that enables one to face the heat of the day confidently, knowing there is refreshing and relaxed power awaiting under the leadership of One wiser than we.

4. "He Restoreth My Soul"

A letter written to me concludes with: "Life ended for me somewhere during these years . . . through a slow process. It took years to stifle my faith; but now it is entirely gone... I am only a shell. Perhaps the shell . . . [is] gone."

I would like to talk with the writer of that letter about the meaning of David's words in the Twentythird Psalm, "He restoreth my soul." David remembered that as the sheep start out in the morning to graze, each takes a definite place in line and holds that same position all during the day.

However, some time during the day each sheep leaves its place in line and trots over to the shepherd. The shepherd gently rubs the nose and ears, lightly scratches the ears, and whispers in an ear of the sheep. Reassured and encouraged, the sheep takes its place in line again.

The human mind is like the human body: It can be wounded. Sorrow is a wound. It cuts deeply, but sorrow is a clean wound, and will heal unless something gets into the wound, such as bitterness, selfpity or resentment. Wrong is also a wound.

When I violate my standards I wound my mind, and it is an unclean wound. Time will not heal that wound. Gradually, a sense of guilt can destroy a life and make it "only a shell." There is only one Physician who can heal.

"He restoreth my soul" can have another meaning. Moffatt translates it to read, "He revives life in me." Like a watch, the human spirit can just run down. We lose our drive and push. We become less willing to attempt the difficult. We are crusaders no longer.

Like squeezing the juice from an orange and leaving just the pulp, life has a way of squeezing the spirit out of a person. A person can become "only a shell." We feel the thrill of no new enthusiasm; the dawn of a new day leaves us cold and hopeless.

The Bible tells that God made the first man "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). And God has the

power and the willingness to breathe a new breath of life into one who has lost. "He restoreth my soul"—"He revives life in me."

5. "He Leadeth Me In The Paths Of Rightousness For His Name Sake"

We come to the forks of life's road and cannot decide which way to turn. There are decisions to be made and yet it is so hard to decide. We do get lost. We need guidance, and confidently David in the Twentythird Psalm declares, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness" (in the right paths).

Doubtless David remembers his own experiences as a shepherd. He knew that the sheep has no sense of direction. A dog, a cat, or a horse, if lost, can find its way back. They seem to have a compass within themselves. Not so with a sheep.

The sheep has very poor eyes. It cannot see ten or fifteen yards ahead. Palestinian fields were covered with narrow paths over which the shepherds led their sheep to pasture. Some of these paths led to a precipice over which the stupid sheep might fall to its death.

Other paths lead up a blind alley. But some paths lead to green pastures and still waters. The sheep followed the shepherd, knowing it was walking in the right path.

Though God does not put a bed of roses on the battlefield or a carpet on the racetrack, though He does not promise us an easy, effortless life, He does promise us strength and He does promise to go with us.

6. "Yea, Though I Walk Through The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death, I Will Fear No Evil; For Though Art With Me"

Let me draw an illustration from the story of a mother who collapsed when news came that her son had been killed. She went into her room, closed the door, and would see no one.

Her minister came and sat down by her bedside, but she would not speak to him. For a little while all was quiet, and then slowly he began saying, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Phrase by phrase, he gently spoke the words of the Psalm, and she listened.

When he came to that great phrase of comfort, she joined in and together they said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me."

A smile flickered on her lips, and she said, "I see it differently now." Henry Ward Beecher says the Twentythird Psalm is the nightingale of the Psalms. The nightingale sings it's sweetest when the night is darkest.

I have suggested to many people in "the valley of the shadow" that they get off by themselves in a quiet place. Quit struggling for a little while. Forget the many details. Stop your mind for a little while from hurrying on to the morrow and to next year and beyond.

Just stop, become still and quiet, and in the midst of your "glen of gloom" you will feel a strange and marvelous Presence more powerfully than you have ever felt it before. Many have told me of feeling that Presence—of hearing the nightingale sing in the darkness.

Wherever my pathway leads, I will not be afraid, said David, and countless multitudes also have rid themselves of fear. Why? "For thou art with me." There is power in His presence.

7. "Thy Rod And Thy Staff They Comfort Me."

I once knew a man who was hurt badly in a cyclone. From then on much of the joy of life was gone for him. Not because of his injury, but rather because he was afraid that another cyclone might come. There was nothing he could do. He worried because there was still nothing he would be able to do if he saw another Cyclone coming—until one day his children decided to build a cyclone cellar. They completed it and the man looked at it with relaxed joy. Now, no matter how hard a cyclone blew, he had protection. It was a great comfort to him. In the Twentythird Psalm we read, "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The sheep is a helpless animal. It has no weapon with which to fight. It is easy prey to any wild beast of the field. It is afraid.

But the shepherd carries a rod, which is a heavy, hard club two to three feet long. When David wrote this Psalm he probably remembered his own need for such a rod. In I Samuel 17 David tells Saul how he slew a lion and a bear in protecting his sheep.

Also, the shepherd carried a staff, which was about eight feet long. The end of the staff was turned into a crook. Many paths in Palestine were along the steep sides of mountains. The sheep would lose its footing and slip down, hanging helplessly on some ledge below.

With his staff the shepherd could reach down, place the crook over the small chest of the sheep and lift it back onto the pathway. The shepherd's rod and staff instinctively comfort the sheep.

It is the comfort of knowing that the shepherd will be able to meet an emergency. "Thy rod and thy staff' '—that takes a lot of the dread and fear of the future out of my heart.

8. "Thou Preparest A Table Before Me In The Presence Of Mine Enemies."

In the pastures of the Holy Land grew poisonous plants, which were fatal to the sheep if eaten. Also, there were plants whose sharp thorns would penetrate the soft noses of the sheep and cause ugly sores.

Each spring the shepherd would take his mattock and dig out these enemies of the sheep, pile them up and burn them. Thus the pastures were safe for the sheep to graze. The pasture became, as it were, a table prepared. The present enemies were destroyed.

We constantly must do this for our children. When my children were young

and would go and come from school, a crossing guard would stands on the corner. She is there to protect my children.

I want my city to exercise vigilance to protect our school children from drugs. I feel the same way about obscene literature and many other things that harm and destroy life. We must constantly crusade against the enemies of life.

It is not enough for the farmer to plant his seed. He must go through his crop again and again to destroy the weeds. So must the spirit of God in man militantly crusade. It is not enough just to preach the Gospel. We must destroy the enemies.

9. "thou Anointest My Head With Oil; My Cup Runneth Over."

I will never forget what the coach said to us the first day I went out for football practice. He told us that football is a rough game and if we expected to play it, we must also expect sometimes to get hurt.

So it is with life. If you expect to live it, you must also expect some bruises and hurt. That is just the way it is. And David, thinking of that fact, said in the Twentythird Psalm, "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Sometimes, as the sheep grazed, its head would be cut by the sharp edge of a stone buried in the grass. There were briars to scratch and thorns to stick.

Then, some days the sheep had to walk steep paths under a hot, merciless sun. At the end of the day it would be tired and spent.

So the shepherd would stand at the door of the fold and examine each sheep as it came in. If there were hurt places the shepherd would apply soothing and healing oil. Instead of becoming infected, the hurt would soon heal.

Also, the shepherd had a large earthen jug of water, the kind of a jar that kept the water refreshingly cool through evaporation. As the sheep came in, the shepherd would dip down into the water with his big cup and bring it up brimful. The tired sheep drank deeply of the lifequickening draught.

Remember how, as little children, we would bruise a finger or stump a toe? We would come running to mama, who would kiss the hurt away. There was mystic healing in her loving concern.

As older children we still get hurt. A heart can be broken, a conscience can ache like an infected tooth, feelings can be hurt, and the world can deal cruelly and harshly. One can become discouraged and tired. Sometimes the burden of life can be unbearable.

But also there is the tender Shepherd who understands the hurt of His children and is ever ready and able to minister to that hurt.

Harry Lauder, the famous Scotch comedian, was griefstricken at the loss of his son. But he found the Shepherd. Later he was giving a concert in Chicago before an overflow crowd. He responded to repeated encores, and finally he quieted the audience and said very quietly, "Don't thank me. Thank the good God who put the songs in my heart."

Notice David said, "Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup…"He didn't say "our" heads. It is the singular, personal pronoun. All day long the shepherd has been concerned with the flock. But as they go into the fold he takes them one by one.

I had a professor in college one year who never did learn my name. Somehow, I never liked him very much. I read that Jesus said, "He calleth his own sheep by name" (John 10:3). I like that. It makes me feel important.

The Psalmist said, "He healeth the broken in… He telleth the number of the stars" (Psalm 147:3,4). The power of the universe is power at my disposal.

10. "Surely Goodness And Mercy Shall Follow Me All The Days Of My Life."

Many people think themselves into disaster. They feel a little bad and they fill their minds with the thought of being sick. They start out the day with dread of something bad happening. They look to tomorrow with fear and trembling.

There is a very successful teacher I have read about who teaches people to sit quietly and conceive of their minds as being absolutely blank. Think of the mind as being a motionpicture screen.

Flash on the screen of the mind a picture of something good you want to happen. Then take the picture off. Flash it on again. Take it off. Repeat that process until the picture becomes clear and sharp.

Through that process the picture becomes firmly established in ones s conscious and subconscious mind.

Then the professor tells the student to go to work to make that picture a reality, to maintain a spirit of prayer and faith.

It is amazing how completely and how quickly that picture in the mind will be developed in life.

Quit predicting disaster for your world and yourself. Say with the Psalmist, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

Begin the morning with hope. Plant this firmly in your mind, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me," and they will.

11. "And I Will Dwell In The House Of The Lord Forever."

David closes the Twentythird Psalm with this mighty crescendo of faith.

One of the heartstirring passages in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is that in which "Mr. Feeble Mind" speaks of his hope of home. He says:

But this I am resolved on: to run when I can, to go when I cannot run, and to creep when I cannot go.... My mind is beyond the river that hath no bridge, though I am, as you see, but of a feeble mind.

Sometimes the greatest inspiration for living comes when your "mind is beyond that river that hath no bridge." Were it not for that assurance, many experiences of life would be unbearable.

David did not have the insights that we have. He never heard the words: "I am

the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26).

Just knowing intimately a God like the One he describes in the Twentythird Psalm gave David assurance that at the close of life's day he would go home.

"He Knows The Shepard."

There is a story—I do not know its source—of an old man and a young man on the same platform before a vast audience of people. A special program was being presented. As a part of the program each was to repeat from memory the words of the Twentythird Psalm. The young man, trained in the best speech technique and drama, gave, in the language of the ancient silvertongued orator, the words of the Psalm.

"The Lord is my shepherd . . . " When he had finished, the audience clapped their hands and cheered, asking him for an encore so that they might hear again his wonderful voice.

Then the old gentleman, leaning heavily on his cane, stepped to the front of the same platform, and in feeble, shaking voice, repeated the same words—"The Lord is my shepherd..."

But when he was seated no sound came from the listeners. Folks seemed to pray. In the silence the young man stood to make the following statement: "Friends," he said, "I wish to make an explanation. You asked me to come back and repeat the Psalm, but you remained silent when my friend here was seated. The difference? I shall tell you. I know the Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd!"

This Psalm of David has sung its way across the barriers of time, race and language. For twentyfive centuries it has been treasured in the hearts of people. Today it is more beloved than ever before.

The reason it lives? Not just because it is great literature. Because it tells that above all the strife and fears, the hungers and weaknesses of mankind, there is a Shepherd.

A Shepherd who knows His sheep one by one, who is abundantly able to provide, who guides and protects and at the close of the day opens the door to the sheepfold—the house not made with hands.

In the quietness of the South Pole Admiral Byrd suddenly realized he was "not alone." That assurance caused faith to well up within him, and even though he stood in "the coldest cold on the face of the earth,'' he felt a comforting warmth.

The Twentythird Psalm gives men that same assurance. That is why it lives in the hearts of men, regardless of nation, kindred or creed. I am complete in Christ He is my great Shepard and I need to listen and follow Him.

The Most Important Question of Your Life:

What Will Happen to You When You Die?

If you are unsure of the answer to this question, or if you are afraid you will not spend eternity in heaven, there's good news for you: "…God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16)

Because God loves and values you so much, He made a way for you to be saved. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die so mankind could be redeemed from sin. The Bible says concerning salvation: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3)

Salvation does not come by joining a church, following a certain religion, doing good deeds, or living a good moral life. The Bible says there is only one way to recieve salvation. You must be born again by accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Settle the most important question of your life! Pray the following prayer and recieve Jesus as your Savior:

Dear Heavenly Father,
I come to you in the name of Jesus.
You said in Your Word, "…if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9).
I believe in my heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
I believe He was raised from the dead for my justification.