

THESE ARE THE DAYS THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS, PART 2

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Psalm 23 “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 for ever.”

In the first part of this Bible study, we began to explore the deeper meaning of what this Psalm 23 means to the individual and the instruction that God gives to each of us to deal with the anxiety produced by a world that is spiraling out of control. If a person is allowed to follow his human emotions, many of us would be filled with dread and fear of what is coming upon the earth.

Like a good shepherd, our Lord and Savior delivers us from the feelings of anxiety and promises that He will always be with us, and will never forsake us. But first we have to submit to His direction, His leading and realize that we don't know the way through this crooked path in front of us, which is our lives, and that since we don't know the way, we need a shepherd that does know the way. We must look to Jesus for our guidance through this world in which we are but pioneers, sojourners in a land that is not our home.

Turn with me now to Luke 11:34 and listen to what Jesus says,

“If the eye is single, then the whole body will be full of light. If the eye is dual (or evil), how great is that darkness”.

What's He saying? He's reminding us, that we need to keep our eye on Him, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus is our light and if we keep our eye on Him, then our body and spirit is full of light, but if our eye is dual and looking elsewhere besides Jesus, then how great is that darkness. We will never find our way.

We are commanded to be Holy as we follow the good Shepherd. How can we follow His leadership, if we fail to live as He lived? Turn with me now to Romans 12:1-2:

“ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,

v.2. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

We have to be willing to submit wholeheartedly to the leadership of the Lord God, our Shepherd. We must be willing to say, “I’ll go anywhere, I’ll do anything, I’ll be anything. I’ll carry any load, live anyplace you want me to live, do anything you want me to do. We must be willing to put away sin as He points it out to us. Now that doesn’t mean we’ll be sinless, on the contrary, but if we are following what the Bible tells us and follow the truth that we have, that’s 95% part of the battle (my estimation, not scientific) , and the rest falls into place that is indefinite or unknown.

If we are willing to be brought into conformity to Jesus Christ in every area of our life, and we are allowing Him freedom to work in us, then He will reveal more truth to us. But He won’t if we are consciously holding out and defending sin in our lives. He reveals His truth only to men and women with an open, and obedient heart. God desires to lead us into greater and greater righteousness in our lives as well, and we should be concerned about obtaining His righteousness, as humanly possible, in this life.

Let’s look at what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:7,

“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”.

God has called us unto sanctification and holiness. It is His intention to sanctify us entirely. This verse is referring to not committing fornication, but being sanctified and abstaining from sinful pleasures and acts against your neighbor, your brother, or your sister. We want to know that God is our Shepherd, but we must not tolerate sin in our lives. They may go unconfessed for long periods of time, but if we confess our sins,

“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1st John 1:9.

But let’s notice something in the beautiful Psalm 23 we are exploring. At the end of verse 3, David makes an assertion. Why does the good shepherd lead us in the paths of righteousness? He guides us “for His name’s sake.”

That is for the sake of His glory, and the reputation of His own name and honor. What kind of reputation would a shepherd in Ancient Israel earn if everyone knew he was careless and irresponsible with his own sheep?

Let me ask you another, more important question. What kind of reputation would God earn for Himself if He were careless with those who belong to Him and are in His charge? Those that are following and faithful to His call and responded to His invitation from the Holy Spirit to accept His free gift of grace? What is His promise? Understand that God’s name is on the line here, in your life, and others who have been redeemed by His own blood. He wants to show the world that He is faithful to provide for all your needs and guide you in righteous paths, and lead a holy life, as much as possible, this side of glory.

So far we have seen that the LORD should be trusted as the good Shepherd, especially as One who provides for His own and faithfully guides them as well. But in shepherding in the land of Ancient Israel, it consisted of more than just providing for and guiding one’s sheep. The Shepherd must also PROTECT them. This of course, is the focus on verse 4.

GOD PROMISES TO PROTECT YOU AND ME!!

David wrote “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”. (Psalm 23:4)

The phrase “valley of the shadow of death” most likely refers to the shadows cast by deep ravines with sharp cliffs, possibly in the Jordan valley. There is actually a place along the road to Jericho, I’m told, that is called “the valley of the shadow of death,” where robbers would hide and wait for the unprepared and unsuspecting victims. A shepherd leading his sheep had to pass these dark areas with the Shepherd guiding them.

Maybe this was a time when David was fleeing from Saul, and his attempt to try and kill him, but the point of the verse, is that God uses His rod to deal blows to the enemy, not to His sheep. They are tenderly pulled out of danger with his staff, which was a long crooked pole that could pull a leg away from danger, or a tap on the side to get them back in line, tenderly and with love. He doesn't whack us over the head with this rod, saying, "you bad sheep. Get back in line" and use a heavy rod on us. No, He lifts us up in His arms and gently leads us away from danger, but only if we trust and allow him to do so.

It is not that God will shield us from every harmful circumstance, as this is patently false as many of us can testify. People actually die prematurely, at least in our mind. But even in death, God is with us, so why should we fear something so natural? Death is a part of life and will visit all of us, if the Lord should tarry. But Romans 8:38-39 says:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

v. 39, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Three things we must know. First nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ, during those experiences. Second, He alone passes approval on what things are permitted to afflict us and the trial we must bear. And thirdly, He will only test us for our own good and deeper knowledge of Him. We need to know that God will never abandon us. He is not the hired hand, but the faithful Shepherd. John 10:1-4 :

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

v2, But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

v3, To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

v4, And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice."

Dropping down in the chapter. v. 11-14

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

v. 12, But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

v13, The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

v14, I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

Can you see how He calls His sheep, and that He is the gate in and out of green pastures? He has only permitted what in His wisdom is ultimately good for you and will never allow permanent separation to come between you and Him. You can trust Him to protect you from anything He does NOT desire for you life.

IN the Old Testament, God the Father is designated as "The Shepherd of Israel." He is the Pastor of the Jewish nation. When Jesus declared Himself, "the Good Shepherd" in John 10:11, the Jewish people knew that He was claiming to be Jehovah, in the flesh and that He was proclaiming Himself, to be God. God has lifted the name of Jesus above every name and He is the good Shepherd of the Church on earth.

GOD SPARES NO BLESSING!

Moving onto verse 5 and 6 of this beloved Psalm, the picture here is of God as a gracious host, and throwing a banquet and sparing no extravagance for the invited guest. David says, “my cup overflows.” Which could either mean that the quality of the drink is absolutely superb or that the host had provided him with an abundance. Either way, the tremendous grace of God is evident in David’s experience here. In the land of Ancient Israel and surrounding areas, no one was more safe from his enemies, as when he was in a Bedoin Chief’s tent and a meal had been placed before him. His enemies could not touch him. His head was anointed with oil, a generous gesture from the host and implies honor and favor.

In fact, the implication in v. 5 is that this has been David’s experience with God up to this point in his life and verse 6 seems to indicate that David is confident such grace and fellowship with God will continue throughout all his days. And so it will be with us in our time, and in our life. He says, in verse 6, “Surely (notice David’s confidence) goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life”. Rather than being pursued by his enemies, (eg. Saul) the goodness and mercy and God’s loving kindness will follow him all of his days and he knows that he will dwell in the house of the Lord for as long as he lives. David envisions the direction his life will take as centered around fellowship and communion with His God, our God. The grace of God can accomplish that in our lives as well. Do we realize how gracious God has been to us in Jesus Christ? He has forgiven us our sins against Him and given us His Spirit to enable us to walk with Him.

Read with me 1st Corinthians 2:12-16:

“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

V13, Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

V14, But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

V15, But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

V 16, For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

We ought to rejoice in God’s grace toward us, rather than be overcome with anxiety over the circumstance the good Shepherd allows in our lives. Even in trials, He is right there with us.

BECAUSE THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT LACK ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

Psalm 23 “And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” Unbroken, eternal fellowship with God! What fellowship! What joy divine! His coming Kingdom is a place where we will be in eternal fellowship with our Shepherd, King Jesus Christ.

Jesus promised in John 14:1-3. “Let not your hearts be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go, I will come again to receive you unto Myself: that where I am, there may you be also.” He’s building us a mansion right now. And it’s not here, but there in Heaven, somewhere, out there beyond the stars. He’s coming to bring us to His place, not the other way around.

No one says it better than Kyle M. Yates. “It is all made possible because of the love of God for us and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who paid it all that we might be ransomed. He died in our place. We received eternal life through faith in Him as our crucified and risen Saviour. The condition of our salvation is faith in Him. The real ground of our redemption is the blood of Jesus Christ. He died and rose again for US. Now He lives in US. God the Father is the source of our salvation. God the Son is the channel through which it comes to US. God the Holy Spirit is the agent who makes it effective in US. His provision for US is the costliest transaction ever conceived in the heart of God. It took the precious blood of His own Son to pay the debt. We enter into the full realization of

this salvation by complete surrender to Him with the certain trust in Him to provide all our needs. We continue in Him as the Shepherd continues constantly with US.” (Preaching from the Psalms, p. 74).

Indeed, this is the only way we can live the Christian life. Our Shepherd has provided us all we will ever need. As we hand over to Him our needs, He graciously hands over to us the provision. All we have to do is acknowledge our needs and surrender them to Him. I exchange my need for His abundant supply.

THOUGH HE IS IN HEAVEN, THE GREAT SHEPHERD IS STILL SEEN CARING FOR HIS SHEEP!

“ Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-21

Think on that: "He has risen from the dead and He has ‘equipped you in every good thing to do His will.’” He “works in us to do that which is pleasing in His sight.” It is all done to glorify Him forever and ever.

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD IS GOING TO MAKE HIMSELF VISIBLE ONE DAY, SOON!!

“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” 1 Peter 5:4.

The word for “appear” means “ to make visible, clear, manifest, know, to uncover, to lay bear, to reveal.” One day he is coming and every eye will see Him. It will be at banquet of awards in heaven. He will honor those who have been “good and faithful,” It is another trophy of grace, our crowns of gold upon our heads. Under-shepherds will “receive the unfading crown of glory.” It will not be a bouquet of flowers that will fade and die and it won’t be a wreath that will fade away in a day or two. It won’t be the applause of men that diminishes over time. No, it will be the eternal crown of Glory that we will cast at His feet to worship Him on that day.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARIZATION

If the LORD is your Shepherd, what can you hold onto and be fully confident of?

Because the LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not lack any provision of needs in this life.

Because He makes me to lie down in green pastures, I shall not lack nourishment.

Because He leads me beside quiet waters, I shall not lack rest.

Because He restoreth my soul, I shall not lack forgiveness and restoration.

Because he guides me in the paths of righteousness for His names sake, I shall not lack a right relationship with God.

Because I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, and I shall not lack encouragement and hope.

Because Thou art with me, I shall not lack for a constant companion.

Because Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me, I shall not lack guidance and protection.

Because Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies, I shall not lack honor and respect.

Because Thou hast anoint my head with oil, I shall not lack power and authority.

Because My cup overflows, I shall not lack joy, and an abundant life.

Because goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life, I shall not lack contentment.

Because I dwell in the house of the Lord forever, I shall not lack assurance of eternal security in the Lord.

Yes, my friend, the LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not be in need of anything.

The LORD is my Guide, I shall be led by Him.

The Lord is my King: I shall be a guest in His palace.

The LORD is coming soon, and I shall be with Him in His Kingdom!!!

Does this world try your soul? Does it drive you to fear and a feeling of hopelessness? Are you at your wits end wanting someone to throw you a life-line? I am throwing you a life-line of eternal life found in only One Way, Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory.

Have you found the LORD as your Shepherd? Believe right now, that you're a sinner. Admit that you have fallen short of the mark to stand before a Holy God. Believe in your heart that God has raised His Son Jesus from a grave in resurrection after being crucified on a cruel cross. Believe that He came and died for your sins, my sins and wants only to save you from the penalty of death that we all deserve for sinning against God. Believe that He ascended to Glory to sit at the right hand of the Father God in Heaven and waits only for the signal from the Father to come reclaim what He has already bought with His own blood...His creation, including YOU. I ask you to make that prayer right now, with your mouth, confess the LORD as your Savior, and follow Him in obedience in water baptism.

He will become instantly, the Shepherd in your life, the answer you seek, the filling of an empty space in your life, and in your heart...do it today, while there is still time...

Yes, my reader, we live in a time that tries the unanchored soul that has no mooring to anything solid. Cast your cares upon Him and anchor in the solid Rock that will keep you and guide you through the storms that are sure to come. As I think on the cares of this life, and the devastation surrounding every man, woman and child on this planet, I rely on another promise that God gave, that applies to only those found in the loving arms of the Shepherd, my Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 91:

“ A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come nigh thee.

-Only with thine eyes, you shall look and see the reward of the wicked,

-Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place,

-No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling.”

This is a time that does try a man's soul, but those who look to the “Good Shepherd”, need not fear, but confidence by faith, in the provision's of God.

“For 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)

This is Pastor Mike Taylor, praying you will find my Good Sheperd, my Rock in this life. May God richly Bless you. Contact me at realteam1999@sbcglobal.net for comments , prayer, or biblical answers to your questions. Or visit me online for more biblical teaching from the Word of God at www.churchofgod-usa.org. May God richly bless you.

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