

THESE ARE THE DAYS THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS, PART 1

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12/16/2015



“THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated” Thomas Paine

The opening paragraph was written by Thomas Paine during the beginning of the Revolutionary War. He was calling to arms those who loved freedom and hated tyranny. We have reached a similar junction in the road we now are faced with in this age of technology and the upheaval that it has caused to allow our government to intrude on every portion of our lives,. The problem will only strengthen as the days grow more treacherous and dangerous as we continue this journey to the end of the days of man's rule upon this earth.

We live in a world in which many people if not most, are engulfed with fear and anxiety. Some fear the future; and they're anxious about what's going to happen in that future. Others fear the past and they're anxious about what has happened. And still others fear even the present as anxiety has gripped their souls and they cannot imagine how they can cope with the ugliness of present circumstances in their lives. Thousands of people each day wake up with untold burdens to bear and anxiety with which they must deal with. Are you one of these? Are you bearing secretly a heavy burden? Are you worried about the future? Are you worried about your finances? Do you see your way of life slipping away, your families future, or the present world around you? Do you worry about the world stage with ongoing terrorism, the failing world economy (at home and abroad) and life in general with all its trials? The world is fearful of the rise of Islam with it's indiscriminate attacks on a peaceful people. The world has been rocked lately and are fearful with the latest terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California, or the attack in Paris, France of armed Muslim thugs who kill “infidels” for their false god, Allah and submit to a god that is the antithesis of a loving God found in Christianity. We fear the loss of freedom and the life we have enjoyed up to this point, as our government appears to be stripping away our basic freedoms.

How can a person cope with what's around them, if they are only relying on themselves feeling so vulnerable to an evil ideology, or for that matter, the evil that resides in our own halls of government and enslave us to the concept of a “new world order”? Many would take up arms and create civil unrest, or break away entirely from the USA, as Texas has threatened, but is that the path any of us should take?

Please understand, I feel your pain, as many of those who read this are doing what is required of them in this society. There are those who will not assimilate to the culture of the USA or the rest of the free world. They live in another parallel “dimension” that is governed by hateful beliefs of superiority to other religions and only wish to enslave those who only wish to remain free. Now look at yourself and what are you trying to do? You may have gone through school, some college, got married, working hard, following what is required to make a living in a peaceful world, but you still are anxious about the future and life in general. You have good reason. How should we respond? The most important question then becomes, “how does God want me to respond to the anxiety in my life?” Thomas Paine wrote the above passage calling on the citizen's physical response to a world

ruled by tyranny. I wish to look at how we should respond today, in our time to our world and look at the source of our strength in these troubling times.

Like all the great questions of life, scripture affords us an answer. I've been dealing with Roman's chapter 8 in the last few messages, and now let us go to a promise found in the Old Testament of how we can cope with this world from the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. I'm talking about the promises found in a most beloved passage found in the Psalms. In Psalm 23, David gives us the example of how we're supposed to trust in God. Most Christians have put to memory this "pearl" of the Psalms, but never take time to ponder its deep meaning and how it applies to our everyday life. Let us jump back in time, to another time period that was fraught with evil and men that shed blood quite easily. Let us look at the time period from shepherd boy that grew to be a king.

KING DAVID WROTE OF HIS "GOOD SHEPHERD".

There is a lot of commentary on when David actually wrote this Psalm. This was a time when written that David may have been running from Saul, who was trying to kill him, as most people feel this was the history behind this Psalm. Psalm 23 then provides a model for us. It is one of the many paradigms of truth to be followed though-out our lives that is found in your Bible as we respond to all the difficulties and worries that come our way.

The Psalm has two basic divisions, each one providing part of the answer to our question about worry. The first four verses focus on God as the faithful and good Shepherd of His people. It calls us to trust Him as such. The second section made up of the last two verses, focuses our attention on God as a gracious host, preparing a splendid meal for a guest, and results in our rejoicing over His grace toward us.

Take some time and stop for a moment and read this lovely Psalm before you go on. Have you read it? Good, let's move on.

When I examine this lovely Hebrew song in detail, I have the firm conviction that it reaches a perfect climax in the person and the work of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I see in the character of the Shepherd, the sweet fragrance of our Savior as I breathe in His Word. This Psalm may not be strictly Messianic in its prediction of the coming of the Jesus the Messiah, but it suggests thoughts that point in the direction of His coming.

Let's jump over to Isaiah 40:10-11:

"Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

(v.11) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming day when "the Lord God will come with a strong hand and His strong right arm ruling for Him. He will come to lead us to greener pasture, and return the earth to her former pure state. There will be no need for fear, as the lamb will lay down with the lion.

Another Hebrew prophet in similar vane saw the coming of the Messiah as Lord and Shepherd:

"And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I, The LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them: I, the LORD have spoken". Ezekial 34:23-24:

Keep in mind that King David had been dead six hundred years when Ezekiel was writing this prophecy! The prophet is speaking of a even greater One, greater than David. He is the Messiah who will come at the end of this age and He will shepherd His people being of the root of David.

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO LEADS AND GUIDES

Even though the soul is tossed about with events that are beyond our control, we have solace in the One who walks with us through it all. I am a firm believer that God allows nothing to come against His chosen “sons of God” unless it is in His will and for our ultimate good. I am reminded of the verses found in Romans, and as you may know, one of most favorite chapters that Paul wrote and I must repeat it here:

“For we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God, to them that are the called, according to His purpose.

For whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed the image of His Son, that He may be the first born among many brethren,

And whom He foreknew, those He also called, and whom He called, these He also justified, and these He justified, He also glorified.

What shall we say of these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, along with Him, give us all things? (Romans 8:28-32)

Did you catch that? “along with Him, give us ALL things”....what has God given His only begotten Son?

Answer: everything and we will share in that glory. Mind boggling, is it not? It is emphasized in prior verses and these confirm one another:

“The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed with suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified together.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.” Romans 8:16-18)

It is a glorious promise that God has given to each of us, who call upon the name of Jesus in faith and believing for His Atonement on Calvary's cross and His ultimate resurrection and glorification, sitting now at the right hand of the Father for each of us who embrace this truth.

But you ask, when reading this lovely, poetic verses that Paul wrote, “what can I do right now, in these troubling times?” As mentioned, you need someone to guide you through the mine fields that are the sin soaked earth your feet rest upon. Let us take God's promises, one of thousands listed in the Bible, that let you know God is with you. Jesus leads you and Psalm 23 is a God given promise of being led by God's Holy Spirit in a place where we do not fear, but rely on our Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

PSALM 23: A GLORIOUS PROMISE

“The LORD is my shepherd: I shall not want”. Psalm 23:1

There is security in the presence of the good shepherd. The Psalmist David dares to reach out and call Jehovah his very own Shepherd. It is intimately personal. Our God is a personal, loving Father. He is my Shepherd, and He is YOUR Shepherd. You must have faith, as King David did, that God is your guide in this life.

David uses the name of the Lord who is always seen as absolutely faithful to His people. He had a vibrant, living faith in the LORD God. Therefore he can say confidently just as God is faithful in meeting his present needs, God will also meet all his needs in the future. With the LORD as his Shepherd, David looks forward to the future. He will never “suffer any want.” Just as the good shepherd provides all that his sheep needs, the LORD will provide all that His people will ever need.

Remember Romans 8:32 quoted above? *If you possess the LORD, who possesses all things, then you lack nothing. David thought of God as his protector and provider, but also as his King. He also, thought of Him as his Shepherd, with all the meaning it had in the Near East in general and in the Law in particular. Because the LORD was David's provider, he lacked or wanted for anything. A good shepherd by his very nature will always supply all of the lamb's needs. In a similar way, a good Father will provide for every need of His children.*

Some people mistake what the Psalmist is saying here. I had the same problem at one time. *Looking back, this troubled me as a small child. I thought that David was saying "I shall not want" or David didn't want God as his shepherd, but I came to understand that he was not in "want of anything".*

SATAN TRIES TO STEAL THOSE PROMISES

Note that Satan has attempted to portray God, in mankind's history as a begrudging giver who only provides when He must. Satan desires to deceive those who trust in God, and wants them to believe they are lacking and deprived of the good things in life. This is the picture Satan tries to paint in suggesting that God had withheld the fruit of every tree of the garden from Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:1). God is also portrayed as a begrudging giver in the temptation of our Lord when He was in the wilderness for 40 days (Matt. 4:1-11). Why would anyone listen to the author of all lies?

The mentality behind David's words is completely opposed to the Madison Avenue propaganda where we are constantly being told that we have many needs, all of which can be met by buying some new (or old) product. We need "sex appeal" so we must buy a new toothpaste, a new kind of mouthwash and a new brand of soap. We need self-confidence and a better self-image, therefore we must wear stylish clothing determined by the garment industry. Our whole mode of thinking is "want centered". David tells us that to have God as our shepherd is indeed to have everything we need or want.

As we seek God, we are not getting second best from Him. He is a faithful Shepherd to give us only what is excellent according to His own purpose and divine will. Can we trust Him for that?

So then, if we lack anything in our lives, then God is not our shepherd. Simple as that, as there are only two options. If this world is our shepherd, then we are in want. Or if alcohol or drugs are our shepherd, or hard rock music, or money, sex, or pornography, then we are never satisfied. Be honest with yourself, as no one is looking as you read this. You know that we are forever in some kind of want, some kind of need if we are depending on this world. Because if you will own up to it, we never know exactly what is best for us, especially when things go sour and we don't know where to turn to next. Just step back for a minute and look around you, or read the latest horror reported on your locals newscast, or your published newspaper headlines. Do you need a shepherd?

Point being, we are sheep. The idea is analogy of a sheep going astray. Sheep get into everything self destructive, and they stray easily. Ever been around sheep or goats? Some really dumb animals, but then God says I am one! Kind of hurts your feelings at first, until you realize, you know, He's right. I am a sheep. Without Him as my guide, I'm forever in trouble. We are all prone to wander. Isaiah said it best in chapter 53 and it's a wonderful prophecy about the coming Messiah and a description of Him, of His suffering and why He had to take our place.

"We are all like sheep who have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him, the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

I know my tendency toward self-indulgent individualism, of going my own way and doing my own thing. That's me. I'm a wandering sheep. And if Jesus Christ is to be my shepherd, I have to admit that I need one. It is difficult, but that is where we must start. Once we admit that need, we discover the truth of what David is saying. "We shall not want."

In this Psalm, David enumerates the ways in which the Good Shepherd meets our needs. The first is found in V.2 and part of V. 3:

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still water: He restores my soul."

Our God meets the needs of the inner man. Meditate a minute on that verse and the symbolic picture a flock of sheep beside a still, crystal clear pool of water. There is lush green grass all around and perfect peace and harmony. The sheep are in no fear. For men, it is the feeding on His Word. We draw upon Him and we are satisfied. We look to Him, the author and finisher of our faith. Pools of living water, is synonymous with the Holy Spirit that God gave us on Pentecost. And with His Holy Spirit, we should never fear.

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

v28 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

v29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

v30 They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?

v31 Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

v32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

v33 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

v34 Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

v35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:27-35)

The Word of God does this for us. It brings us, first, to the person of Jesus Christ. “Beyond the sacred page”, as the old hymn says, “we see the LORD.” We see Him, and we eat and drink of Him, and we discover Him to be the resource of what we need. Let’s now read what Paul says in II Corinthians 4:15-18:

v. 15 “For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

v16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

v17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

v18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Look at verse 16, “Though the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day,”. Our souls are restored. How you say? As we feed upon Him. As we come to know Him, believe what He says, and act on His Word, we discover that the inner man is fed. We draw strength and courage, because of true faith in the true Shepherd of mankind, Jesus Christ.

Jesus, our Lord, the Good Shepherd does another blessing to each of us and that is to give direction in our lives:

“He leads me in paths of righteousness for His names sake.” Psalm 23:3.

The Hebrew word translated “paths” means “a well-defined, well worn trail.” That indicates again how easily led astray sheep are. Because even when the trail is well laid out and well work from use, they still need a shepherd. They are still inclined to wander away, no matter how obvious the trail may be. The Good Shepherd knows the trail. He has been there before, and the sheep trust Him. People worry about the world’s future, the direction in their lives and where they are headed. How will it affect my family, my loved ones around me, my business, my associates? Government tyranny, loss of freedoms, Obamacare, the rise of terrorism even in this country and an economy teetering on the edge of oblivion. We see the loss of jobs, no matter what the idiots in Washington spew out to the contrary. You may have lost your job. You may have lost your home or taken a part time job, or even two or three, just to make ends meet. If you're relying on yourself, then I don't blame you for being scared. There is anxiety at every turn.

There is a classic story of a man undergoing basic training in the army. He was pulling KP and was given the assignment of sorting potatoes. There was a huge mound of them and the sergeant told him to put all the bad ones in one bin, and all the good ones in the other bin. The sergeant came back about two hours later to find the man just looking at one potato. There was nothing in the bins. The sergeant yelled, “What the matter, don’t you like the work, soldier?” The soldier said, “Sarge, it’s not the work, it’s the decisions that are killing me.”

I often feel that way and I know you do too. We are not afraid of the work, but we have to make countless decisions, day after day, which touch the lives of our children our spouses, and our loved ones in the extended family. We need wisdom. We need somebody who has the answers. We need someone who knows the trails, and someone whom we can trust. We must submit wholeheartedly, to the leadership of the Shepherd. That is the basic attitude we must maintain. Unless we are willing to admit that we don’t know the way through the wilderness and faithfully submit to His leadership, we will never find the way. Just ask any newly homeless person who is lost in despair, or the latest suicide attempt placed on suicide watch at a local hospital what they fear the most. To most is a loss of hope, or a loss of any control over their lives.

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 daily lives, 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.

“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)

Next time, we'll wrap up this up concerning trusting the Lord Jesus Christ in this world filled with evil and insanity that only grows with each passing day....See you then.

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 at www.churchofgod-usa.org for more teaching from our Bible. May God richly Bless you.

TILL WE MEET AT JESUS FEET.