



## 2 | Psalm 23:4-6

### IN THE VALLEY WITH MY SHEPHERD

*The Lord is with me and protects me!*

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Welcome to our worship time. We are so glad you could join us.

### **Call to Worship:**

Isaiah 40

Go on up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good news;

lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;

lift it up, fear not;

say to the cities of Judah,

“Behold your God!”

<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord God comes with might,

and his arm rules for him;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup> He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

he will gather the lambs in his arms;

he will carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead those that are with young.

### **Songs**

Blessed Be Your Name

Count Your Blessings

Christ Our Hope in Life and Death

All the Way My Savior Leads Me

### *Introduction*

Open your Bibles to **Psalm 23**. The title of our message today is “He is with Us in the Valley.”

Some of the greatest things have happened when life has stopped for people in situations like ours.

**Isaac Newton:** In London, a quarter of the population would die of plague from 1665 to 1666. Because of the disease the famous scientist, Isaac Newton, took a year off from his studies and studied from home. He did not sit back and do nothing. He redeemed the time and discovered how gravity works. He called that year, “the year of wonders”.

**John Bunyan:** I think of John Bunyan who was arrested and put away at various times in his ministry for preaching the Gospel without a preaching license there in Bedford, England. In total, he spent 13 years behind bars. During that time, John Bunyan looked to his Shepherd and wrote many wonderful books, the most famous of which is *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

When we are going through times like these, it is so important for us to put our complete trust in our Shepherd. Now’s not the time to freeze up in fear but to shine like lights as Christians. We should be the ones who have our eyes completely on the Shepherd.

Today we are finishing up Psalm 23. Next week we will look at how Jesus calms the storm. But would you turn over to Psalm 23 and let’s read it.

**23:1-6** | A PSALM OF DAVID. <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

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## 1. OUR SHEPHERD PROTECTS HIS SHEEP (23:4)

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The Shepherd **protects** the sheep.

**23:4** | Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

### THE VALLEY OF DEATH

God is certainly a source of comfort in a person's dying moments. However, this verse primarily speaks of the shepherd's ability to protect his sheep in moments of danger.<sup>1</sup>

The sheep love the Springtime and Summer with the Shepherd. They get to go on the mountain tops and eat the lush pastures and lay by the still waters. But in the Autumn and Winter, they go back into the Valley, where the Shepherd keeps the sheep sheltered and cared for. They are not to stray from the Shepherd. That's why he has his rod and staff, which comfort the sheep.

The valleys are places of rich pasture and much water, but they are also places of **danger**. There are wild animals. Sudden storms. There may be floods. Since the sun does not shine into the valley very well, there really are shadows which at any moment may become shadows of death.<sup>2</sup> That is why we need to draw near to the Shepherd.

#### *Drawing Near to the Shepherd*

The Valley may seem so lonely. It's not as desirous as the mountaintops and the pastures and the still waters. But it is in the Valley that the sheep are fed by the Shepherd's own hand.

During this time the flock are, for the most part, alone with the shepherd. They are under his personal attention and the bond between sheep and shepherd is strengthened. Valleys are designed by God for the Christian to strengthen us. Listen to the words of James Montgomery Boice, the one-time pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA:

It is important to note that "the valley of the shadow of death" is as much God's right path for us as the "green pastures" which lie beside "quiet waters." That is, the Christian life is not always tranquil nor, as

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1-41: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 211.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

we say, a mountain-top experience. God gives us valleys also. It is in the valleys with their trials and dangers that we develop character.<sup>3</sup>

—James Montgomery Boice

Yet the valley has its own unique problem. The problem is fear. What is the answer to it? Clearly, the answer is the shepherd's close presence, for he is the only one who can protect the sheep and calm their anxieties. We need to remember that Christ has defeated our greatest enemy: death. He will never leave us nor forsake us. Someone wisely said:

The darker the shadow, the closer the Lord!<sup>4</sup> —Alex Motyer

### *A Shadow is not to be Feared*

David says: “I will fear no evil, for you are with me...” (23:4b). It is the presence of our loving God that casts out all fear. No matter what valley you are in, there is fullness of joy in God's presence.

David says: “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” —Psalm 16:11

**For a Christian, death is a mere shadow. It has no power against us.** Remember, a shadow is not to be feared. The shadow of a wolf cannot bite; the shadow of a sword draws no blood. Thus we read, “I shall fear no evil.” Yes, we are frightened by shadows, but we need not be. The shadow is only fearful, when we mistake the shadow for the reality. Satan prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom He may devour, but if you are Christ's then Satan cannot harm you. He can roar but He cannot harm! He cannot do us any harm!

### *The Sheep Need to Stay Close the Shepherd*

What if the sheep do not follow? At times he will take a young lamb, carry it on his shoulders – and sometimes if one of His sheep don't follow, the Shepherd has to lovingly break his leg and carry it around. That's a promise for us. Whom the Lord loves he chastens. If you don't draw near, he may bring some loving discipline into your life, where you will be carried by your dear Shepherd.

## **THE ROD AND STAFF**

En route there are many dangers. “Your rod and your staff they comfort me.” The rod and staff were used by the Shepherd to protect the flock.

### *The Rod (club)*

The rod was a huge club used in close combat and also thrown at wild beasts. Though it evoked fear, it also brought comfort. The rod that should bring us to our senses is the **Word of God**. It's the promises of God to us that keep our enemies of fear, doubt, despair, anger, or bitterness away. Those sweet promises of God are all yours in Christ. And you are an overcomer. You don't have to worry about the enemy roaring at you. I'm so glad that...

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Motyer, “[The Psalms](#),” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 500.

“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.” —1 John 4:4

Satan has no power over us. The battle is the Lord’s. One of God’s clubs that beats away our enemies is the Word of God. It beats away the fears that easily consume us. The Word of God makes the devil flee when we resist him with it.

### *The Staff*

The staff signifies the tender guidance of the Shepherd. If a sheep was about to eat poisonous grass or drink contaminated water, the shepherd would use the **crook** to bring the animal back on track. If the rod symbolizes the Word of God, the staff is symbolic of the Spirit of God. ***The Holy Spirit is our “Comforter” that One who is called along side of us to meet whatever spiritual need we might have.***

A shepherd who knows how to use both the rod and the staff, gives the sheep a feeling of security. Understandably David could say, “I will fear no evil.”

Dear saint, with the rod of God’s presence and his Word and the staff of his Spirit that comforts and convicts us, we can be at peace and “fear no evil.”

Are you dealing with fear? Let God’s Word and Spirit comfort and protect you.

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## 2. OUR SHEPHERD PROVIDES FOR HIS SHEEP (23:5)

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The Shepherd **provides** for the sheep. Notice how far we have come: the Good Shepherd protects His sheep, but He also provides for His sheep.

### ENEMIES ALL AROUND

23:5a | You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...

For the Christian in this life, there are enemies all around. The prince of the power of the air is leading so many around us. We are in a spiritual battle. He wants to sift every one of God’s dear children like wheat.

**The devil reminds us of our past.** The enemy tries to remind us of our sins and failures. But we must realize that all our failures make our Shepherd’s mercies all the more sweet. Do you know how he loves you?

**Your enemy is already a defeated foe.** The Bible says the only thing you need to do to make him flee is to resist him.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” —James 4:7

**You are never alone.** God is with you whatever enemy you face. He’s already one the war. No matter what you see, the devil is on a leash. **He roars but cannot harm!**

### GOD PREPARES A TABLE

23:5a | You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...

God is so victorious, that he prepares a table in the presence of our enemies. This brings us to the battle theme. Saints, we are always in a spiritual war. Never forget that.

We are always on guard, taking up the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit. But our shepherd gives us rest and provision. He's got all you need in this battle.

**Sheep can only eat when they are at rest.** But even if there are enemies, we need to know that the battle is the Lord's. Nothing happens without his permission! All that is happening saints, is from his hand. You may be losing your job and livelihood. Don't look at the world and fear. Look at the Shepherd and rest and eat of his provisions.

If a soldier eats a meal in the presence of his enemies, it is generally eaten very quickly. But sheep can eat leisurely in the presence of their enemies if the shepherd is beside them. There is a part of us that our enemies cannot touch.

### *Jonathan Edwards' Happiness in God Alone*

Jonathan Edwards was, perhaps, America's greatest theologian, a preacher whom God used during the days of the America's first great awakening in the 1740's. As pastor of a church in Northhampton, Massachusetts, he was involved in a controversy. He insisted that those who partake of the communion table need to have made a profession of faith in Christ.

The church was split; seeds of dissension were sown, rumors flew and tempers flared. At a business meeting, a vote of confidence was taken and Edwards was voted out of his church by about 230 to 30. **Years later one of his relatives confessed that he had started the dispute against Edwards out of jealousy.** Of course, that confession was too little, too late.

But how did Edwards handle this turn of events? His reputation was tarnished and his best friends turned against him. One of his friends described it this way, "His happiness in God was beyond the reach of his enemies." He knew that his Shepherd had not left him.

Dear saint, is your happiness beyond the reach of your enemies? Don't let the enemy snatch your joy. Keep your eyes on our dear Shepherd.

### **GOD ANOINTS MY HEAD WITH OIL**

**"You anoint my head with oil."** Such oil was put on the head of the sheep as a repellent from insects. It is one of those special comforts the shepherd gives to his sheep. The sheep does not notice that he is in the presence of these pests, but the shepherd does and knows in advance what to do. Again, the more obedient the sheep, the easier it will be for sheep and shepherd.

As Christians, we get our head anointed with the oil of His Word and Spirit. We need to be in constant communion with God. This is the time to get your head anointed saint. We are going to send you out several things for you to do and watch this week that will edify your soul. We also have our nightly prayer meetings from 7 to 8pm each night.

### **MY CUP OVERFLOWS**

**"My cup overflows."** As a special treat, the shepherd will sometimes put water in a bowl and let the sheep drink from a full cup. Wherever you are, if you have Christ you have **more than you need.** You have "every spiritual blessing" in Christ. You have all the power of the resurrection to say no to sin and yes to all the blessing that God wants to give you. The blessings overflow! You are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ!

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### 3. OUR SHEPHERD PLANS FOR HIS SHEEP (23:6)

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The Shepherd **plans** for the sheep.

23:6 | Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

#### GOD'S GOODNESS

Sometimes it is hard to preach Psalm 23, because it can be easily misunderstood to mean that we will have no real problems in life.

A shepherd takes care of his sheep, but sometimes the Good Shepherd appears to neglect His sheep; life is often cruel and harsh. Job, for example, might say that the Good Shepherd appears inaccessible and silent when His sheep suffer.

God's **goodness** does not mean everything will go right for you. It's really the goodness behind Romans 8:28. Everything that happens to you is good because it will conform you to the image of Christ. **Goodness** means that God will work everything out to his glory and our good.

Truly God's goodness and mercy is Himself. We can say, "I am his and he is mine".

#### GOD'S MERCY

**Mercy** is God's hesed, his covenant, unrelenting love. God's mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. He loves us based on his own mercy.

I deserve hell, but God says: I'm taking away your hell and giving you eternal life with me!

**Sheepdogs:** These two, goodness and mercy, are like sheep dogs that constantly follow after the sheep and nip at their heels, guiding them to the house of the Lord, in his presence, where we will dwell forever.

#### Conclusion

We are here, as it were stuck in our houses. We are getting more and more familiar with our own family! Some days we are going stir crazy. I don't know how long this "shelter in place" will last for your houses. But I do know that I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. And in a real way, I'm already there. My heart is his abiding place. I abide in the shadow of the Almighty!

"In Thy presence is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Psa 16:11).