

Our Faithful Shepherd (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Last week we discussed the first three verses of Psalms 23.

! Tonight we're going to continue, but we're going to leave the green grass and the still waters to travel through a valley of darkness to the upper fields of a grazing in the mountains.

He told his son, he said, you may take the flock yourself today, my son, but guard them, guard them well.

These words, so heavy with responsibility, were spoken to 15-year-old Abdullah, who was about to take his father's flock to the grazing field for the first time.

Abdul's response was, I will guard them to the best of my strength, my life for theirs.

[1 : 07] This brought home to me our shepherd, our great shepherd, our good shepherd, and later our chief shepherd, who cares so much for his flock, us as his sheep, that he laid his life for us.

Possibly 3,000 years ago, a young lad named David spoke these same or similar words to his own father, Jesse.

History records numerous incidents of shepherds encountering wild animals and thieves having to surrender their own life in defense of their flock.

The one difference between these stories and the promise given by the great shepherd is that our Lord cannot be overwhelmed by any enemy.

That is why David, in this soul-strengthening verse, was able to find comfort, even though he knew that he would face many dangers along the way.

[2 : 16] And that is an assurance for us. We know that no matter what we go through, what we face through life, because of our faith and trust in the Lord and Savior, we have that same assurance that David had that he is going to guide us through these times.

The Lord Jesus not only declared his love for the sheep, but as a good shepherd, gave his life for his sheep. In John 10, 11, it reads, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. This act is a clear indication that he is a true shepherd in contrast to the hireling, who, when seeing a wild animal, would often leave the sheep and allow them to be scattered.

The hireling, according to John 10, 11, cared not for the sheep. That is the contrast between our shepherd and one who may call himself our shepherd.

In verse 4, where we begin tonight, it starts with the word gamachai. In fact, that's a Hebrew word, and I asked a preacher about that. So if I'm not quite right, it's his fault.

[3 : 30] But that word stands for even though. And so in verse 4, it says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Here it says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

David was pointing out that the Lord's protection and guidance is easily assumed when we are by waters of rest. And I've seen some heads, yes, and that is true a lot of times.

But now he is emphasizing that we may rejoice in the Lord's protection and leadership, even though our journey takes us through dark times. The Palatine Shepherds was a master of reading tracts. Many paths sprawled across the rugged terrain. Some paths made by a wilderness beast. Others by robbers laying in wait to cause harm.

Also the winds would etch out subtle tracts in the sand. To the untrained, dull eyes of the sheep, they all looked alike.

[4 : 39] But it led to nowhere. The sheep were wise to follow only the shepherd. In Psalms 31, verse 3, we read, For you are my rock and my fortress.

Therefore, for your sake, lead me and guide me. Who always leads them along the right path?

After all, it was a shepherd's reputation at stake here. Go back here, it says, For his namesake. So the Lord's name is at stake here.

The scene changes here and later in Psalm 23, but not the shepherd. From a fertile slope and a bubbling stream of verse 2 and 3, we travel through the valley of the shadow of death.

Literally translated, the valley of deep darkness. In verse 3, we are promised by the shepherd's Savior that he will guide us along the right track.

[5 : 47] Psalms 23, 3 reads, He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake. Verse 4 simply says that one of these paths wind along this deep downward valley below.

Now, early in the year, when there's still snow in the mountains, the flock graze in the lower lands until the snow has melted on the highlands.

Then the shepherd will lead his flock to a better grazing field in the mountains. In Ezekiel 34, 17, it reads, I will feed them in good pastures.

Revelation 7, 17 says, For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water.

These trips include some dangerous paths filled with uncertainties and fearful sights. The way is dark, unfamiliar, difficult.

[6 : 52] Along the way, the valley of the darkness leads along turbid waters. But the sheep walk beside the shepherd, knowing they will be safe with him.

We as good sheep are sometimes led by him into valleys of darkness where there is fear, danger, and uncertainty. But our shepherd knows that only way that we can reach the higher place of Christian experience is not on the playgrounds of prosperity, but in the school rooms of suffering. It is along those dark and narrow valleys of difficulty we learn to trust in him. Notice that the psalmist said, Because thou art with me, he is kept from being afraid.

Mark it down. There is no experience, no valley, no matter how severe or uncertain, that we must journey alone.

Take special note there. What David claims as his source of comfort here is the Lord's rod and staff. The shepherd's rod was a symbol of power.

[8 : 23] It was made of oak, about two feet long in length. It was used in defending a flock against wild animals that seek to cause harm.

The head of the club, or the rod, was round, usually whittled from the knot of the tree. In which the shepherd had pounded sharp bits of metal.

As a skillful shepherd, not only swung the rod to smash the head of an attacker, but he could also hurl the club like a missile across the heads of his flock to strike a wolf lurking in the distance.

The shepherd's rod was a symbol The shepherd's staff was his crook, which was bent or hooked at the end. This provided the shepherd with an instrument of prying a sheep loose from the thicket, pushing branches aside along a narrow path, and pulling wandering sheep out of holes into which they had fallen.

Like the rod, the staff was a symbol of the shepherd's power. The sheep took comfort in the strength of the shepherd.

[9 : 41] There is no need to be uncomfortable with the power of God. We can find relief and peace of mind in the fact that He is able.

The Lord's rod and staff, they comfort me. In spite of the fact that this psalm has many full and meaningful phrases, the first portion of verse 5 seems difficult to understand.

No sheep ever ate from my table. And what does it mean in the presence of my enemy? Suddenly, the analogy breaks down.

Abruptly, we are transported from the green pastures, the valley, and the rugged mountain to a table in the presence of my enemy.

Charles W. Slimming does a magical job in explaining this. He tells of the shepherd who comes to a new field. In the new field, this is the table in which he plans to graze his flock.

[10 : 52] But the shepherd does not just turn the sheep loose. He inspects the field for vipers or small brown adders that live in the ground.

They frequently pop up and nip the sheep on the nose. The bite sometimes causes an inflammation which can at times cause the sheep to die.

being aware of the danger, the shepherd restrains the sheep from the new field which may be infected until he has inspected the field.

Again, a table. The shepherd walks up and down looking for small holes. And when we talk about the anointing of oil, here's your definition of what happens here.

As he's walking down looking for the small holes, he takes a bottle of thick oil from his girdle. And men, I don't think it's the same girdle they're talking about nowadays, but it's called a girdle.

[12:03] He rakes down the long grass with his staff. He pours a circle of oil around the top of each viper's hole. Before he leads the sheep into the field, he also spreads the oil over the heads of the sheep.

In that sense, he anoints their head with oil. When the viper beneath the surface sensed the presence of the sheep and tried to attack them from their hole, they are unable to do so.

Their smooth bodies are unable to pass over the slippery oil. They become prisoners in their own hole. The oil on the sheep's head acts also as a repellent, so if a viper does come out of the hole, the smell drives the serpent away.

The Lord does that for his people. We dare not leave out my cup overflows. this refers not only to the oil but the water.

Cool well water. Some refreshing. If you remember in the first couple of verses, we talked about the water where he led them to a stream and he would move the stones around to calm the stream.

[13:26] Here he's in a place where he does not have the stream. He says, when there was no stream, the shepherd would quench his flock thirst beside a well rather than in a wilderness.

Some wells were deep. To draw the water, the shepherd used a long rope with a leather bucket at the end. The bucket held less than a gallon and had to be drawn by hand then poured in a large stone cup beside the well.

this process was long and laborious. Depending on the size of the flock it could take a while. Only a kind and thoughtful shepherd satisfied his sheep with overflowing cups.

How lavishly our Father provided. Ephesians 3.20 reads, Now to him who is able to do exceedingly and abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generation forever and ever.

Amen. So we've talked about the table and the cup here represented by this and I found a picture of it it's like a little trough deal but he poured that water in there and they could drink from it to the point of its overflowing.

[15:04] Hayden Robinson shares this thought with him the calf is also the fatted calf the road the road is always the best road the joy is unspeakable and the peace passes all understanding there is no grudging in God's goodness he does not measure his goodness by drops like a druggist fills a prescription it comes to us in a flood again his cup runs over if only we recognized the lavish abundance of his gifts what a difference it would make in our lives if every meal were taken as a gift from his hand and would be almost a sacrament in his book the shepherd psalm

F.B. Meyer refers to goodness and kindness as our celestial escort because we seem to wonder and prone to leave the God that we love he sends his faithful companions out after us this being goodness and mercy kindness and loving kindness our Lord deals with us so kindly and so graciously what a difference between God and man God knows how to deal with the children in Philippians 2 13 we read for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure and in Romans 8 28 we read and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God to those who are called according to his purpose this psalm concludes with a wonderful thought

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever notice that the 23rd psalm begins with the word Lord and ends with the word Lord because he then could be in the presence of the Lord we as believers will enjoy never ending fellowship with our Lord and Savior when I finished this and I read about it it gave me a totally different look of the 23rd psalm and looking from David's eyes what I'm seeing here David is basically yielding his life out what he's gone through and how he's trusting the Lord and all the trouble he's gone through and how the Lord has brought him back and now he's looking forward to that day just like we do that he will begin the presence of the Lord it's something we're promised something that we will all see one day