**“The Valley of the Shadow of Death**”Psalm 23:4a

**Good Morning Beloved,**

* Written over 100 years ago… From Harry H. Barry (1855-1919)[[1]](#footnote-1)
  + “In pastures green?” Not always so;

sometimes He, who knoweth best, in kindness leadeth me

in weary ways where heavy shadows be;

out of the sunshine warm and soft and bright,

out of the sunshine into the darkest night.

I oft would faint with sorrow and affright,

only for this, I know he holds my hand;

so whether in the green or desert land

I trust, although I may not understand.

* + “And by still waters?” No, not always so;

oft times the heavy tempests round me blow,

and o’er my soul the waters and billows go.

But when the storms beat loudest and I cry

aloud for help, the Master standeth by

and whispers to my soul, “Lo, it is I.”

Above the tempest wild I hear Him say,

“Beyond this darkness lies a perfect day.

In every path of thine I lead the way.”

* + So whether on the hilltops high and fair

I dwell. Or in the sunless valleys where

the shadows lie, what matters? He is there;

and more than this, where’er the pathway

leads, He gives to me no helpless broken reed,

but His own hand, sufficient for my need.

So where He leads me, I can safely go,

and in the blest hereafter I shall know

why, in His wisdom, He hath led me so.

Two thoughts in the Valley of the Shadow of Death…

1. God chose your path.
2. God is with you on the path.

Reading of God’s Word

***23****A Psalm of David.*

***1*** *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

***2*** *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

*He leads me beside still waters.*

***3*** *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness*

*for his name’s sake.*

***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.*

***5*** *You prepare a table before me*

*in the presence of my enemies;*

*you anoint my head with oil;*

*my cup overflows.*

***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. [[2]](#footnote-2)*

**Preaching God’s Word**

1. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,* 
   1. Spring time… green pastures and still waters
      1. Every need provided for…
         1. Yet there is a need to be restored… a “cast down sheep” can’t right itself and needs the shepherd to set it aright.
            1. If you are left to yourself… you are going to DIE.
         2. Also… the intuition of the sheep is off so it can’t graze like other animals… it needs to be guided in the firm paths of righteousness.
            1. If you stay in this place… you are going to DIE.
   2. Summer time… is different.
      1. The heat of the sun has turned the once lush fields brown.
         1. The midday temperatures have evaporated the streams.
            1. A shepherd will lead the sheep from the low country to the higher country during the summer through the valley path.
      2. They make this journey because…[[3]](#footnote-3)
         1. #1 – The springtime experience changed… the heat of summer… forced a movement… and the gentles grade to a higher country was along the smooth valley path
         2. #2 - the path along the ravine is the place with the most watering places for refreshment
         3. #3 – the riches feed and the best forage is along this route
      3. The sheep… which have poor eye-sight (to go along with their lack of intuition) must be guided by the shepherd along a path that is often so narrow that they can’t turn around.
   3. POINT: The LORD, the Shepherd, takes his sheep through the valley.
      1. Derek Kinder – “the dark *valley*, or ravine, is as truly one of His ‘right paths’ as are the green pastures – a fact that takes much of the sting out of any ordeal. And His presence overcomes the worst thing that remains: the *fear”.[[4]](#footnote-4)*
         1. But it is not just a shady spot… it is the valley of “the shadow of death”
            1. In the original language it is speaking of…. “… *of extreme danger Je 2:6 ψ 23:4[[5]](#footnote-5)*
            2. It is a word that shows up 26x in the OT could mean…

***death-shadow, deep shadow***

“dark as death” – like a superlative

Deep darkness

* + 1. It is a place….
       1. M. P. Krikorian notes…[[6]](#footnote-6)
          1. There is an actual valley of the shadow of death [just south of the Jerusalem-Jericho road] in Palestine, and every shepherd knows of it.
          2. It is a very narrow defile through a mountain range where the water often foams and roars, torn by jagged rocks.
          3. The path plunges downward from about twenty-seven hundred feet above sea level at one end to nearly four hundred feet below sea level at the other, into a deep and narrow gorge of sheer precipices overhung by frowning Sphinx-like battlements of rocks, which almost touch overhead ...
          4. The valley is about five miles long, yet it is not more than twelve feet at the widest section of the base.
          5. The valley of flaming purple rocks is made perilous and dangerous not only through vicious animals that crouch in their dens and lie in wait in their covert, and deadly snakes lurking among the rocks, but because of its furrowed floor, badly eroded by the floods and waters from cloudbursts.
          6. The actual path, on the solid rock, is so narrow that in places the sheep can hardly turn around in case of danger.
  1. Transition: Some of you may go to this physical path… but beloved… ALL of us will walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
     1. The scorching heat of the summer to a sheep is what the searing heat of sin has done to all those connected to Adam.
        1. We live in a land haunted by the shadows of death as the wages of sin.
  2. Application: By faith remember… God chose your path.
     1. God is your shepherd and is leading you.[[7]](#footnote-7)
        1. How could it possible benefit me in to be in this valley?
           1. #1 – Hezekiah was puffed up with pride until he was brought low (2 Chro. 32:25-26)
           2. #2 – The nation of Israel was led in the desert for 40 years to see their own heart and know the chastening of God (Deut. 8)
           3. #3 – Peter was sustained by the prayers of Jesus as the shadows of night sapped his strength (Luke 22).
           4. #4 – Paul learned that the thorn in his flesh revealed that the grace of God was sufficient in his life (2 Cor. 12:7-9).
     2. Beware the false voices of ease….
        1. John Calvin – “Thus he (David) does not promise himself continual pleasures; but he fortifies himself by the help of God courageously to endure the various calamities with which he might be visited.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
        2. Orientation at Seminary…
           1. “the dark night of the soul happens…”
        3. Pastor…
           1. “hardships are inevitable… but they will not last…”
  3. Transition: The walk along the long “drives” in the summer… but remember you drive cattle… you lead sheep… have a unique theme.

1. *I will fear no evil,* 
   1. Of all animals to be living in fear… sheep should rank highly…
      1. They only have teeth on one jaw… at best they can inflict a good pinch on a foe.[[9]](#footnote-9)
         1. Evil abounds…. *RAH…* evil as this all-inclusive statement about BAD.
   2. In a place where there are…[[10]](#footnote-10)
      1. Physically shadows of death…
         1. Rampaging rivers in flood
            1. Kenneth Bailey tells of his own encounter with such a place where, in 1957, a flash flood thundered through a deep and narrow gorge, killing some fifty French tourists and giving the literal sense of “the valley of death” to an actual physical place.[[11]](#footnote-11)
         2. Avalanches
         3. Rock slides
         4. Poisonous plants
         5. Ravages of predators
         6. Awesome storms of sleet… hail… and snow… to go with your thin skin which makes sheep susceptible to colds… pneumonia… and other respiratory complications…
      2. Spiritual Shadows of death…
         1. The greatest danger of all is the judgment for our sins.
            1. Job 3:5 – valley of deep darkness

Illustration: where darkness haunts the sheep like a lingering entity…

* + - 1. The realities of death’s shadow are ever present for the Christian too.
         1. Rom. 8:35f - *Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?****36****As it is written,*
         2. *“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
                we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*
  1. Transition: How could a sheep… with no self-defense training…. Ever walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

1. *for you are with me;* 
   1. Everything pivots for the psalm at this moment…
      1. The first verses are almost like a sheep describing life under the care of his shepherd to another sheep.
         1. Let me tell you about my Shepherd.
            1. Green pastures…
            2. Still waters…
            3. Restores my soul….
            4. Leads me in path of righteousness
         2. Conclusion: what is the name of your shepherd?
            1. THE LORD.
   2. Now… David, the human sheep, addresses his words to His Shepherd himself.
      1. The praise to the nations… pivots to a confidence with God.
         1. No longer “He”, but “YOU”.
   3. The Shepherd is a companion to sheep that can easily be frightened.
      1. The LORD is the companion to suffering sinners who live under the shadow of death.
         1. Just as Moses went back to Egypt… the LORD was with him (Ex. 3:12)
         2. Just as Isaiah described passing through waters and fire without fear… for the LORD was with him (Isa. 43:2-3).
         3. Now David clings to the Good Shepherd by faith… that the LORD, you are with me.
2. Conclusion
   1. How can we say this verse?
      1. God chose your path.
      2. God is with you on the path*.*
         1. Your God is the God of the Valley.
            1. Nothing has happened to you outside of his purposes for you, Beloved.
            2. His wisdom brought you to his place and his mercy will sustain you amid any peril.
   2. How do you know that?
      1. Because Jesus Christ lived his whole life under the shadow of death.
         1. The Gospel of John reveals that Jesus lived every day aware of “his Hour”, meaning his death on the cross.
            1. Your Good Shepherd knows the terrain you are walking AND has over come the greatest danger of all… the judgment of sins…for you.
      2. He is the Risen Lamb who has promised…
         1. Matt. 28:20 - *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
            1. So that we the sheep of his fold can know…

Romans 8:33ff - ***33****Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.****34****Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.****35****Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?****36****As it is written,*

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
    we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

***37****No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.****38****For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,****39****nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

* 1. Or to say it another way…
     1. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*
     2. *I will fear no evil,*
     3. *for you are with me;*

1. As quoted in *A Sheep Remembers* by Calhoun, p. 57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esv?ref=BibleESV.Ps23.title&off=24&ctx=Lord+Is+My+Shepherd%0a~23%C2%A0A+Psalm+of+David.) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 23:title–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Derek Kinder, *Psalm 1-72*, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, [*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bdb?ref=BrownDriverBriggs.BDB+853.2&off=977&ctx=4%3b+%D7%90%D6%B6%D7%A8%D6%B6%D7%A5+%D7%A6%D7%B3+Is+9%3a1.+~b.+of+extreme+danger) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 853. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As quoted in *A Sheep Remembers* by Calhoun, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. WCF V.v - The most wise, righteous, and gracious God, doth oftentimes leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalm I-XXXV, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Tim Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-shepherd-can-lead-you-through-the-valley-of-darkness-because-hes-been-there/?srsltid=AfmBOoqfAaYqdQ5dv-aaYFkSglkBrJ4YLLqOrBtl6qAgXTDEWUJDJG7N [↑](#footnote-ref-11)