

Sermon Notes
Good News Church
"The Shepherd & Our Stories"
Psalm 23:4 – Comfort in the Valley
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8-3-25

The 23rd Psalm

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

2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.*

3 *He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness*

For His name's sake.

4 *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I 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 have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.*

6 *Surely goodness and mercy (lovingkindness) will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Psalm 23:4 – *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."*

Valley of the Shadow of Death

Almost all of the Psalms 1-22 are of David crying out to God for help and rescue in his distress. Way before his sin of committing adultery with Bathsheba, King David had done everything right, from the time he was a shepherd boy in the field (1 Samuel 16) to his faith in God to give him victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17), to serving and ministering to King Saul by playing his harp. Nevertheless, King Saul had a jealous hatred towards David and sought to kill him (1 Samuel 19). David was forced to flee immediately from Saul's presence in order to save his own life (1 Samuel 20). He hid in caves (1 Samuel 22), pretended like he was insane so that his enemies would protect him, and ran for his life through wilderness, forests, fields, mountains, and valleys (1 Samuel 23). There were even times when David could have easily killed Saul but he chose not to because he was "the Lord's anointed." (1 Samuel 24, 26) Even still, Saul's desire to kill David was not dissuaded.

This is the backdrop of Psalm 23:4 when David writes, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."*

David had learned that God is faithful, trustworthy, full of lovingkindness, and in spite of his circumstances, that God is with him, God is for him, and God loves him.

In my mind, there is probably no greater benefit of the Christian faith than to know that our sufferings (our valleys) are not outside of the will and purposes of God for our lives, but well within God's will and purposes for us.

When David was running for his life, God was had a plan to use his “valley of death” circumstances for good. Even more, while in the valley of the shadow of death, David experienced God’s presence (i.e., “You are with me.”).

Lots of Different Valleys / My Deepest Valley – Divorce

- *When they walk through the valley of weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs, where pools of blessing collect after the rains. - Psalm 84:6*

“Even though I walk through the valley...” (God’s Presence in Suffering)

- Jesus knows our sufferings because He knew suffering Himself, and His suffering was far beyond anything we could ever experience.
- Jesus was despised, rejected, criticized, made fun of, misunderstood, gossiped about, disrespected, betrayed, abandoned, falsely accused, brutally beaten, inhumanely tortured, and unjustly killed.
- Jesus purposely experienced every element of suffering, so that He could be with you in yours.
- *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” – Hebrews 4:15-16*

“I fear no evil, for You are with me.”

- *When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. - Isaiah 43:2, 3a*
- *Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. - Isaiah 41:10*
- *Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord is the one who goes before you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor forsake you. - Deuteronomy 31:8*

“Your rod and Your staff,”

Rod (stick, sceptor) – מִשְׁבֵּט (shay'-bet)

CORRECTION

- Literal meaning - club or stick (for discipline), scepter (of justice) Hebrews 1:8
- *“The Lord disciplines those He loves and chastens those He accepts as His children.” - Hebrews 12:6*

- *Your throne is founded on two strong pillars - righteousness and justice. Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.* - Psalm 89:14
- God is a judge who is perfectly fair. He is angry with the wicked every day. - Psalm 7:11
- “For I, the Lord, love justice. I hate robbery and wrongdoing.” - Isaiah 61:8a
- He will judge the world with justice and rule the nations with fairness. - Psalm 9:8

Staff (walking stick, shepherd's crook) – מִשְׁעָנָה (mish-ay-naw') PROTECTION

- In Psalm 23:4, the shepherd's staff guides, rescues, and reassures the sheep. By selecting this word, David highlights the Lord's personal involvement in directing and protecting His people.

“they comfort me.”

- The combination of the rod of discipline and the staff of protection by the ever-present shepherd, who is watching over and watching out for the sheep, results in great comfort (i.e., *Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*)
- We think that comfort happens most whenever corrective and protective guidelines are not present (and we can do whatever we want to do), but studies have shown over and over again, that children thrive the most (by far) whenever the boundaries of discipline and protection are present. Amazingly, even when love isn't present, children thrive within the boundaries of correction and protection, but when love is there, children thrive exponentially more.
- **Richard Wurmbrand** – imprisoned in Romania in 1948 (17 years) by Communist Soviet Union. “Tortured for Christ,” founded “Voice of the Martyrs”

“There's always a reason to rejoice. There's a God in heaven and in the heart.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

1. We all need Shepherding.

- Jesus, the Good Shepherd
- The Church, God-ordained, called, accountable, caring shepherds.
 - Children > Parents / Adults > The Church

2. Suffering is God's path.

“We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” – Romans 8:17

3. Comfort is God's plan.

- Life is full of valleys.
- The Valley is where God meets us.
- “God's office is at the end of your rope.” – Steve Brown

We tend to use the reality of valleys and suffering to convince ourselves that there is no God. But if you've ever really been in a valley and cried out to God for help, you know that it's in the valley of the shadow of death that proves the existence of God, because there's no greater place in life to experience God's comfort than in the valley. When we have God as our Shepherd and we're in the valley, He's there with us.

And THAT'S Good News!