

J.J.

BELOVED PSALMS Series
The Lord Is My Shepherd
Psalms 23 (Part 3)

ANNOUNCEMENTS :

- Men's Hiking - Saturday, September 12 @ Forks of the Credit, Caledon, ON
- Sunday School Teacher's Appreciation Gathering - Saturday, September 19 @ 6:30-8:30 PM @ the Meeting Room, Library. Dinner will be provided. All other details to follow.
- Worship Team Appreciation Meeting - date is TBD.

Prayer Requests:

- Criscelle and her mom's condition.
- Salvation of Jaime's family in the Philippines and all of our respective loved ones, who have not known our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Missionaries that are being supported by DCF.
- Pray for DCF's USP (UNITY, SAFETY & PURITY)
- Students who are going back to school (Elem, HS, College or Univ)
- Birthday Celebrants for September

INTRODUCTION :

Story : A little piece of wood once complained bitterly because its owner kept whittling away at it, cutting it, and filling it with holes, but the one who was cutting it so remorselessly paid no attention to its complaining. He was making a flute out of that piece of ebony, and he was too wise to desist from doing so, even though the wood complained bitterly. He seemed to say, "Little piece of wood, without these holes, and all this cutting, you would be a black stick forever – just a useless piece of ebony. What I am doing now may make you think that I am destroying you, but instead, I will change you into a flute, and your sweet music will charm the souls of men and comfort many a sorrowing heart. My cutting you is the making of you, for only thus can you be a blessing in the world."

I shared with you last week that the word Psalms means melody or a poem set to notes.
A lot of beautiful psalms that minister to us was borne out of pain and suffering.

Just like Psalm 23, it was said that David wrote this when he was forced to flee the Judean wilderness because his own son rebelled against him and toppled him from his throne even though he was God's anointed.

David was helpless and he remembered the time when he was a young shepherd who took care of his helpless sheep and he knows God will take care of him.

If you are in a situation right now where relationships are falling apart or you just feel helpless, this psalm is for you.

Psalm 23 : 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in 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 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 love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Prayer

THE BENEFITS OF FOLLOWING THE LORD

REVIEW :

This is a very personal psalm for David. How do we know?

Needless to say, those who will benefit from this psalm **are the ones who personally follow the Lord as "my" shepherd.**

There are four benefits of the sheep whose Shepherd is the Lord.

- I. MY LORD GIVES ME SATISFACTION
- II. MY LORD GIVES ME DIRECTION
- III. MY LORD GIVES ME PROTECTION
- IV. MY LORD GIVES ME RECOGNITION

We studied already how the Lord gives us satisfaction and how the Lord gives us direction. I believe that knowing God's direction specially in a difficult situation is very important and we have tackled that last Sunday and in our Bible study. **If you weren't here, please feel free to get in touch with me** and I will gladly show you again through His word if what you are doing is what God wants or not.

But today we are going to study now the verse that is known and memorized by a lot of people even to those who are non-Christians specially if they are undergoing such a difficult trial in their life.

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.

In order to really appreciate this verse, we need to study it according to its context meaning, we need to look at what are the verses before it and the verses after it.

Note : I have always advocated that when you read the Bible, look at the words.

And from this, we can see two principles that have unfolded.

Here's the first context :

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

Principle 1 : Even if you are following God's path, there are times He will still allow you to pass through problems.

If you notice the verse, God guides the sheep in sure paths of righteousness. He has given the sheep direction and yet it still walked through the valley of the shadow of death.

Biblical Illustration : David was anointed to become King of Israel and yet Saul wanted to destroy him. Or Joseph was just doing the right thing of not sleeping with his master's wife and yet he got jailed for it. Or Daniel was just praying to the Lord and yet he was placed in the lion's den. Or the apostles were spreading the gospel and yet all of them suffered persecution and death. And of course, our Lord Jesus Christ, several times he mentioned, he has come to do His Father's will and He ended up on the cross.

Principle 2 : Our relationship with God becomes more personal, more intimate during times of intense trouble or suffering.

Please notice that subject has shifted from third person to first person.

*Psalm 23 : 1 **The LORD** is my shepherd, I shall not be in 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 paths of righteousness for **his** name's sake.*

Now notice the shift.

*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 love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Christianity is walking with the Lord and having that intimate relationship with Christ. And you become intimate only with another person if we pass through suffering with them.

Quote : "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my experience, has been through affliction and not through happiness." – Malcolm Muggeridge

Show me a Christian who walks closely with God and I will show you a person who have had many trials and sufferings in his life.

Illustration : A. Parnell Bailey visited an orange grove where an irrigation pump had broken down. The season was unusually dry and some of the trees were beginning to die for lack of water. The man giving the tour then took Bailey to his own orchard where irrigation was used sparingly. "These trees could go without rain for another 2 weeks," he said. "You see, when they were young, I frequently kept water from them. This hardship caused them to send their roots deeper into the soil in search of moisture. Now mine are the deepest-rooted trees in the area. While others are being scorched by the sun, these are finding moisture at a greater depth."

In short, the more afflictions or sufferings we experience the more we find our only source of comfort is from God and that's why our relationship with Him becomes more intimate.

This is one of the reasons why God allows suffering in our lives. And again, this will only be true to you if you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Shepherd.

How does the Lord protect us in the midst of evil?

III. MY LORD GIVES ME PROTECTION

1. You protect me from my anxiety

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

Sheep Behaviour 101 : Sheep are easily terrified whether there are sudden or disturbing noises or there's a sudden change in the surroundings just as if there is sudden darkness.

Now, as the evening is about to approach, the shepherd will lead the sheep back home and what happens they have to go through the valleys and if you are familiar with the topography of the Judean landscape, it's not flat.

Etymology : shadow of death is one word : tsalmaveth which means "deep shadows"

Topology : The Judean valley has deep parts and when the sheep will pass through these crevices, it forms long shadows and to the sheep his surroundings have darkened and that's the time they begin to panic and be afraid.

Just like us humans, we are uncomfortable with darkness and when I say darkness, it's a situation when you can't see anything. When you don't know what's happening or what's going to happen in our life.

Illustration : In the Philippines, my parking spot was on the 5th floor going down the basement. One time, there was no electricity for quite some time and the emergency lights lost also its power. But I still decided to park down the 5th floor. It's because my headlight was turned on. But when I reached my parking spot, I turned off the key to my car and my headlights and it was pitch dark which means, I can't even see my hand in front of my face. But I said, I'll go to the stairs since I've passed that way several times already. I got out of my car and like a blind man was trying to guess where the stairs was and I just realized I made a big mistake. So I decided to go back to my car but I can't find it anymore and I tried to feel the engine of the car but each car was cold. I still don't have remote in my car yet at that time. Until I was doing it for more than 10 minutes and just couldn't find my car, that I started to panic and was just in a corner and was shouting, "Help! Help!" But I was on the 5th level. I was panicking and so anxious.

When everything becomes dark and you don't even know what's happening or what's going to happen or until when this is going to happen, we also start to panic.

Example :

- Sudden loss of a job. Why? Until when will I find a job? And when we think about it and don't know the answers, we start to be anxious.
- Or a sudden terminal sickness? The doctor can't even assure you if you will get well or not, then we start to be anxious.
- Or a relationship suddenly gone sour

Important to Remember : It's called "*valley of the shadow of death*". It's not called "the valley of death". There's a big difference.

Illustration : The dog can bite you but the shadow of a dog cannot bite you. A sword can hurt you but the shadow of the sword cannot cut you.

Application : When our life is in the valley of the deep shadows, our biggest enemy is our own imagination.

Illustration : Scientific studies show that our brains are hardwired for negativity, for bad news so when a not so good thing happens, our first natural reaction is to start imagining bad things to happen.

But imagination is not the real thing. It cannot harm you since it's not even real. It's imagination.

So how does my Lord protect me from our fears or anxiety

*I will fear no evil, **for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.***

In short, if you are imagining bad things that will happen, or harboring negative thoughts. But instead of thinking these things, what you need to do is to think about the truth!

What is the truth? The Lord is my shepherd!!!! You are with me Lord!!!

One of my most favorite quote when I don't know why things are happening or what's going to happen :

"If you can't see His hand, trust His heart."

(Show photo featured in Phil Star) Illustration : Tomorrow marks our 9th year here in Canada as a family. We migrated together as a family and just uprooted my kids, left everything behind even if by God's grace, our life in the Philippines is already comfortable. But God has shown us clearly, He wanted us to move to Canada. But before migrating, I had lots of anxieties and this is my only prayer to the Lord.

Exodus 33:15 "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."

We came here to Canada and to those who know our family, our first few years were the toughest and my assurance is we kept on reciting Psalm 23 and Psalm 91 as a family.

Now let me tell you one of the tools of the shepherd

"Your staff" - it's a long stick with a shaped hook at the end.

Illustration : Sheep can only see up to the tip of his nose and when darkness suddenly sets in they are very fearful creatures and so they easily panic. And if they can't hear the voice of the shepherd, they get agitated quickly

The staff is used for two things :

1. To gently tap the sheep kapag nawawala siya sa flock.
2. Minsan may nalalaglag sa bangin, ginagamit niyang pandukot ito.

This is the reason why we can have comfort even in the midst of trouble. Because I am assured if the Lord is my shepherd then He will guide me if I'm straying out of path or He will rescue me or pick me up with his staff if I fall down.

2. You protect me from my adversary.

I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me..

Remember, we pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

Usually, it is in these valleys that wolves, thieves and other predators lie in order to kill the sheep.

Matthew 10:16 "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves."

Beloved of Christ, we have an enemy we cannot see that is determined to destroy us if you are a follower of Christ.

Sometimes, he orchestrates things or uses people to plan, to kill us or destroy us specially for preachers like me who preaches God's Word. (Luke 22:31) And sometimes, you don't even know why it's happening. You are blind to the situation.

Illustration : Camping pitch dark and I needed to pee but I don't want to turn on the flashlight so that my pupils won't have to adjust to the light. But the problem, it's pitch dark again. I said to myself, "Just as long as I can see a little bit" So I went at the back of the tent into the trees and while I was peeing, I heard a growl so I ran back and tripped on some pegs and eventually got inside the tent. I was terrified either because my imagination was playing with me or there was really a real threat that I don't see.

Nevertheless, what if I know together with me is I have a Lion friend who loves me and is gentle towards me and will do everything to protect me.

This is where the other tool is useful for the Shepherd.

your rod : The rod is used by the shepherd to protect his sheep from robbers or wolves.

At the end of it all, IT'S THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD THAT COMFORTS US, THAT PROTECT US.

For you are with me.

Isn't this what the Word of God says also in Romans 8

Romans 8 : 31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Now look at what Paul wrote when facing suffering :

36 As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Why are we conquerors?

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, (VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH)

will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**In short, it doesn't matter what happens around us, we have peace simply because
LORD JESUS, YOU ARE WITH ME.**

And He promised that nothing can separate us from Him and promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

S.G.D.