

## Psalm 23 – Week of August 7

### **Memory Verse: Psalm 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.

Psalm 23 is often classified as a Psalm of confidence, with David declaring his trust in his God as he compares the Lord to a shepherd leading his flock and a gracious host caring for his guest. Typically, we draw tremendous confidence (as we should) from these images. We see God as a good shepherd, one that will use both his rod (to keep danger away) and his staff (to draw us back into his presence.) We see Him as a shepherd that not only leads us to green pastures and still waters, but makes us to lie down, eat and drink, and be restored.

Later, David describes God as a good and generous host, one who has not only brought us into his home but has anointed us as an honored guest and prepared such a feast for us that our cup overflows.

Our God is a good God who leads us with all of the attention, wisdom, delicacy and love of a shepherd leading his flock, and He is a God that lavishes undeserved and unreserved blessings upon us as a merciful and gracious host does his guests.

But if we walk away from Psalm 23 with only an understanding of God's goodness and blessing in our life, we will miss the deeper truth in David's words.

A shepherd carries a rod and staff with which to protect his flock because he knows that danger and evil will meet them. If the flock were perfectly delivered from all evil, the shepherd would have no need of these tools. In fact, the sheep would have no need of a shepherd at all! It is precisely because evil exists all around them that the flock needs and relies upon the shepherd.

Furthermore, as David states in verse 4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Drawing out David's initial illustration, imagine the shepherd and his flock (in this case, David) coming to a deep valley in the wilderness, full of darkness and shadow and uncertainty. What trials and dangers lurk in this darkness, neither the flock nor David knows. But, David does not pray for God to lead him out of this valley, nor around it, nor above it nor beyond it. No, instead, he acknowledges the valley (and the journey he must take through it), but fully rests upon the goodness of his Shepherd despite the surrounding danger.

How often are our lives met with dangers and trials and evil? How often do we find ourselves staring at (or lost within) a deep, dark valley of turmoil and uncertainty? And yet, instead of reflecting on the goodness of our Shepherd, instead of recognizing that our Lord (the same Lord who has led us to green pastures and still waters, who has kept us safe from

sin and evil, who has lavished mercy and grace upon us, who has restored us and redeemed us through a work all his own) is still a good shepherd and will still be with us in this valley with both rod and staff, we pray for deliverance from the valley. Instead of acknowledging the valley, as David did, and praying "I will fear no evil for you are with me," we are consumed by the valley, worried by it, and we pray, "Lord, please deliver me from this valley. Please lead me out of it. Please remove this danger and uncertainty from my life."

David understood the goodness of his Shepherd so much so that when surrounded by evil on all sides, his prayer was one of confidence and dependence upon God, not an immediate plea for deliverance. May we be a people like him, facing our own trials and tribulations in such a way that we are absolutely content to be with God regardless of our situation. For then we can pray with certainty, "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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