

The 23rd Psalm – Week 5 - June 16, 2021

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head w/ oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, & I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

½ way point. Praising God, now addressing God.

Year is divided for Sheep. Driven to distant summer ranges; long drive.

Sheep moved slowly; go up Mtns behind melting snow to Alpine meadows.

When autumn snows fall on Mtn peaks, sheep are led to lower elevations.

Sheep winter at home on the ranch.

- Never will a Shepherd take the flock where he has not gone before.
- --- God won't lead us where He hasn't prepared the place. He “searched out” the promised land before leading the people out of Egypt. – **Ez. 20:6**
- We talk of “**Mtn Top**” experiences. Sing of going to “higher ground.” Getting above the normal, the lowlands. ** It's not easy.
 - Sheep move to Mtn by climbing up thru valley trails.
 - All Mtns have valleys, ravines, & gulches (a deep cleft). Canyon is long, narrow, steep valley, cut by a river; Gulch is a ravine-like/deep v-shaped valley, ususally eroded by flash floods.
 - **Best way to top of Mountain is thru valleys. Most gentle path.**
 - Note: “walk **thru** the valley...” It doesn't say: I die there. I stop there. I lie down there. **Thru.**
 - Our valley experiences are **bridges** to another pasture where God is taking us ... so we can thrive. Do better.
 - This verse used as comfort in death. Death is a bridge. Child of God have assurance: death is not an end, it's a door to God.
 - Death is a dark valley that opens to the bright light of His glory.
 - It's not something to fear; Gateway to new life. Heaven.

- For those of us who have lost ... we still must live in the here & now. We must walk **thru** some valleys, climb mtns, be led to new pasture.
- These are not dead-end streets. Dark valleys need not be disasters.
 - These are roads to higher ground with God. And God is with us.
 - Faith allows us to be at peace, knowing all will turn out for my best.
 - Knowing God as the “Good Shepherd” makes all things bearable.
- **2d reason** sheep are lead thru valleys - it’s the **well-watered route**.
 - Streams, rivers, & quiet pools there refresh us.
 - It’s in the valleys of our lives that God refreshes us.
 - Not until you walk w/Him thru trouble will you learn His ability to **refresh you... to give you strength . . . to restore your soul**.
 - **Another** truth – only those who have gone thru dark valleys can comfort or encourage another walking thru dark valley.
 - God flows thru us... water flows thru ditches & channels ... where life has cut us deep makes it *possible* for us to bless others.
 - The *best minister to broken hearts* is one who’s had a broken heart.
- **3rd reason** sheep go thru valleys – it’s where the **best forage** is found.
 - Shepherd needs sheep to have water & food.
 - Meadows: best grazing, but valleys often on floor of steep canyons. Dark. An area of predators: coyotes, wolves, etc. Flash floods. Still the best path.
 - Shepherd knows all that, but also knows where we can find strength as He guides us.
 - Looking back – in the dark days of life – God was guiding & sustaining us.
 - That is when faith is strengthened. Nothing stimulates faith in the future more than recalling God in the past.
 - No need to fear; God will bring us thru. B/c He’s w/us, no fear.
 - Mature Christian has walked thru some valleys; we can inspire others.
 - Too often, dark storms cause panic, anxiety; fear. Not how should be.
 - Hold head high; be confident, be calm. No fear. God is taking us to higher ground; we’ll be blessed & become a blessing to others.

Shepherds carry minimal equipment: **ROD & staff**. Suited to each person.

1} Rod is – extension of owners' right hand. **Symbol of strength.**

Moses used his rod as symbol for power. It also reassured the people.

- **God's word is Rod** for us. Guidance, authority for life of peace.
 - Kept from confusion. Know the right thing to do/say.

2} Rod also used for **discipline**, for welfare of the sheep. Rod would be thrown at a wayward sheep.

God's word corrects us. Convicts our conscious. Puts us back on right path.

3} Rod is used to **examine** & count sheep.

Ezek 20:37 – “pass under the rod.” Means more than being under the owner's control & authority, but being personally examined.

- Looked over w/ great care. Intimately known. Skilled shepherd uses rod to part the wool to determine if sheep is healthy, injured.
- You can't “**Pull the wool over his eyes.**” Time to time, carefully examined.
- Only thru this process can hidden problems be laid bare to the Shepherd.

Psalm 139 – wonderful Psalm - God knowing us intimately. **Psalm 139:7-18** – “O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; You understand my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down; You are aware of all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, You know all about it, O LORD.”

- “Search me O God & know my heart; try me & know my thoughts; see if there by any wicked way in me; & lead me in the way everlasting.” **Psm. 139:23-24.**

- If we allow Him, God will show us where we need to change; grow.
- It's for our best. He has our best interest at heart.

4} Rod also for sheep's **protection**. Drive off wolves; beat the bush for snakes

- David no doubt used his rod to kill a lion and a bear.
- **Ex:** in Kenya, moved boulder to drive elephants; killed cobra. Rod in hand!
 - Thy Rod & staff comfort me... so grateful the shepherd had it. Saved.
 - Jesus used **God's word** as a rod during His **temptation**.
 - Again & again, it's our defense. We're loved. Victors. Enemy lies. **99**

STAFF - Quintessential tool of Shepherd. Identifies him. Unique for sheep.

- It's a symbol of the concern & compassion the Shepherd has for his sheep.

- **Rod** is power, discipline, defense ... but **Staff** is comfort, support, strength.
 - Shepherd leans on it; supports him. And it's used only for sheep's benefit
 - **Staff** is **symbolic** of God's **Spirit**.
- 3 areas of sheep management where staff has significant role:
 - 1} draws sheep together. Shepherd lifts a newborn lamb to its mother.
 - 2} draw sheep close to the Shepherd, esp useful for shy, timid sheep.
 - 3} used for guiding sheep. Tip of staff gently placed on sheep's side, pressure.
Special sheep walk almost "hand in hand" w/Shepherd's staff.

God's spirit is our staff.

- "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." – **Jn 16:13**
 - He gently says to us: "This is the way... walk in it."
 - Gentle pressure in our hearts. Promptings.
- God's spirit is also the Voice that reminds us, we are God's child. In His care.
 - Christian life is more than a belief, more than certain values & doctrines... it is experiencing God's spirit... his peace, comfort, love.
 - God is willing to direct the smallest steps & the biggest decisions.
 - The mind of Christ will convey to our minds what to say, do . . .
 - He is even willing to **rescue us when we go astray**
 - Staff used to pull back greedy sheep ... one more mouthful...
 - Shepherd's staff should give us comfort, knowing God is walking w/ us.

Song of the Week – Psalm 23 by Keith Green