

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Psalm 23 – Part 3

I. Verse 4 – “Yea, 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.”

A. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” – Many times, this verse especially, is read during funeral services due to the mention of death. But it really isn’t about literal death. In fact, many scholars state that it should be translated more like “...though I walk through the darkest valley...”. Haddon Robinson writes:

“When we think of a valley, we may imagine a pleasant lowland sweep bounded by sloping hillsides. But the valley that the psalmist had in mind was a chasm among the hills—a deep, abrupt, faintly lighted ravine with steep, jagged sides and a narrow floor. The phrase ‘valley of the shadow of death’ should be translated ‘the valley of deep darkness.’ It was a dreadful, dangerous place for sheep.”¹

1. Notice David doesn’t say that he’s going to live in the “valley”, or stay in it, he says he’s going to “walk through” it. The Bible doesn’t teach that there won’t be “valleys” or dark moments in our lives. But, the Bible does teach us that, as we put our trust in God, He will see us through to the other side of these valleys. David also wrote in **Psalm 34:4-6, 19** the following:

“I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard *him*, And saved him out of all his troubles....Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.” – Psalm 34:4-6, 19.

2. David had many “valleys of deep darkness” in his life. His victory over Goliath was a turning point for both good and bad. The good was he unwittingly won the hearts of the people of Israel. The bad was Saul envied him so badly that he wanted him dead. (Examples of some of David’s dark days: I Samuel 17; 18:1-16; 23:14-15; II Samuel 16:20 – 19:8.)

3. Jesus promised that we would have trials in life.

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world.” – John 16:33 – New English Translation

a. The word “trouble” means; “pressure, compression; affliction, distress of mind, distressing circumstances, trial, affliction”²

b. The word “conquered” or “overcome” here, means; - “carry off the victory, come off victorious: of Christ, victorious over all his foes”³

c. The fact that Jesus has conquered, or came off victorious over our adversary, gives the believer victory as well. (Romans 8:31-39; I John 4:4; 5:4-5; Colossians 1:13; I Peter 4:12-14)

d. Trials are temporary but the things of God are eternal – II Corinthians 4:16-18.

B. “...I will fear no evil; For you are with me...” – The Bible refers to fear hundreds of times. The phrase “fear not” is found in the KJV, 108 times alone. The fear of the Lord is a positive kind of fear but there is a negative kind of fear that has crippling affects. Martin Manser describes this kind of fear as;

¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Trusting the Shepherd: Insights from Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, rev. ed. 2002)

² William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1170.

³ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 426.

“An attitude of anxiety or distress, caused by concern over a threat to one’s future. Scripture provides numerous examples of situations in which fear is experienced. It declares, however, that God alone is to be feared, and moments of human fear can be opportunities for deepening faith in him.”⁴

1. **“...For you are with me...”** – David discovered that the awareness of God’s presence enabled him to be free from the fear of evil. God has always wanted to dwell with His people. In **Genesis 3:8** it states that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. Then, in **Exodus 25:8**, God states, **“And let them make Me a sanctuary that I) may dwell among them.”** Under the New Covenant, every believer becomes the **“sanctuary”** of the Lord in that our bodies are called the **“...temple of the Holy Spirit”** (**I Corinthians 6:19-20**). Jesus even said in His Great Commission, **“...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** – **Matthew 28:20**. (Also see **II Corinthians 6:14-18**; **Galatians 2:20**; **Colossians 1:27**; **II Timothy 1:14**)

“Your conduct must be free from the love of money and you must be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you and I will never abandon you.’ So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can people do to me?’” – **Hebrews 13:5-6** – **New English Translation**

C. **“Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”** – The rod and the staff were common tools of a shepherd in the ancient near east. Donald Stamps in the *Fire Bible* writes:

“The ‘rod’ (i.e., a short club) is both a weapon of defense against predators and an instrument of discipline for the sheep. It symbolizes God’s strength, power and authority (cf. Ex. 21:20; Job 9:34). The ‘staff’ (i.e., a long slender stick with a hook on one end) is used to bring a sheep close to the shepherd, guide it in the right way or rescue it from trouble. God’s rod and staff reassure us of God’s love and guidance in our lives (cf. 71:21; 86:17).”⁵

1. For the believer under the New Covenant, we have the **“rod”** of His Word which is a defense against the enemy as well as the primary way God disciplines His children (cf. **Luke 4:1-14**; **Ephesians 6:17**; **Hebrews 12:5-11**). The **“staff”** could correlate with the Holy Spirit who guides us and draws us closer to Him. God uses both His Word and His Holy Spirit to bring comfort to His people (**Romans 15:4**; **John 14:16, 26**).

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” – **Romans 15:4**

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby), that He may remain with you forever.” – **John 14:16** – **Amplified Bible**

“But the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.” – **John 14:26** – **Amplified Bible**

⁴ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

⁵ *Fire Bible: English Standard Version*, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed. (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Int’l, 2011), 820.