Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – August 10, 2021

The Lord being with you.

Do you ever wonder if your life is just going around in circles? Then maybe, now you hate to think it, but maybe you're just going nowhere? I mean, this thing happens to you and then there's that thing that happens to you. Things come at you from out of the blue and you wonder, you wonder if there is any sense to it, any rhyme or reason.

For a few moments, I want to see how David looks at life. How we looked at where he's been, where he's going, where he sees it all leading him. I'm in Psalm 23 again, that beautiful shepherd psalm where we catch David looking at life. This psalm is the words of a man who has lived much and done much, the words of a man who has sinned greatly and been greatly forgiven, and as David looks at life is mine scenes to go back when he was a boy, and when he cared for his father's sheep. And so David writes, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

It's this last line that title speaking to me today. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. That's how David sees his life.

I was a boy when I learned Psalm 23, and I just did not know what to make of this phrase, paths of righteousness. It sounded good. It sounded something like church and sounded something very holy. Paths of righteousness. What does David mean? As he talks about his Shepherd leading him in paths of righteousness. I was helped with this when I was studying Hebrew, and I translated this phrase, and I saw that paths of righteousness are paths that are tsedeq, that's the Hebrew word here to tsedeq, is when things are right, when things are the way they're supposed to be. For instance, in the law of Moses, Leviticus19:36 weights and measures are tsedic. They're right, when they weigh what they're supposed to weigh, that tsedic. A person is tsedic or righteous when he or she is the way humans are supposed to be. So as David reflects on his life and how his shepherd leads him in paths that are tsedic, David is talking about paths that are right, that is paths hat are the way paths are supposed to be. They are taking you somewhere.

David sees his paths are taking him to shalom to life. No dead ends here.

That's the idea of paths of righteousness, and why most contemporary Bible translations translates this as, the Lord leads me in right paths. In the dry desert of Judea, it took an experienced shepherd to know the right paths to take, to know the right paths that lead to water, the right paths of lead to green pastures.

We know today that sometimes robbers would actually mark out wrong paths, they would mark out deceptive paths that would lead a young inexperienced shepherd and his flock into danger. Now, David looks at his life, and it is certainly a checkered life, a life with a lot of ups and downs, but as David looks at his life, David can say, my shepherd leads me in right paths. My Shepherd doesn't lead me down blind alleys that are going nowhere, my shepherd leads me in right paths with goodness and mercy following me all the way home. Notice David says, He leads me in right paths for his name sake. That's important, for His name sake. David knows that a shepherd's reputation, a Shepherds good name is at stake in knowing how to lead his flock.

I mean, any shepherd who leads his flock out into the wilderness and loses them would be the laughing stock, and all the camps and villages. The Lord leads me in right paths for his name
sake. Read the Bible and you will see that God is concerned about his reputation. God is concerned about his good name in people knowing that He leads us in right paths. God wanted his name to be holy. And that's why Jesus teaches us to pray hallowed be thy name. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

David is saying here that God's good name is all wrapped up in knowing how to lead you and me down the right paths of life.

I can imagine. Yes, there were times when David must have wondered if God knew what he was doing and how he was leading him, when David was fleeing Saul, when he was fleeing and hiding out in caves, I think David must have sometimes wondered about how his shepherd was leading him, but as a years go by, David learns to say He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

This does not mean that right paths always take David or they always take you and me down the yellow brick road. Right paths sometimes take us into dark valleys. Just look at the next verse where David says, Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me. Notice a change, a pronoun here it is, a significant change of pronoun. Up to this point, David has been talking about the Shepherd, third person, he cares for me, he leads me, but now David suddenly switches to second person, as David comes to the darkest valley, we see David not just talking about the

water from rock

Shepherd, David starts talking to the shepherd as in that darkest valley, God draws David and you and me, close to him. I fear no evil, for you are with me.

I can say from out of my own life experience in the lines of many people I know that as we go through life darkest valley, the God's presence can become especially real to us, and we find ourselves no longer just talking about him, we find ourselves talking to him.

Back to the question I began with. Do you ever wonder if you're just going around in circles, if maybe your life is going nowhere?

It can feel that way sometimes, but David was taught by God that our good shepherd is leading you and me in right paths, paths that really are going somewhere. Paths leading us to life and to life for ever more. So remember God is staking his good name on leading you in right paths to His glory.

All the way, my Savior leads me. Cheers each winding path I read gives me grace for every trial. Feeds me with the living bread.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler on the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening. Until next time...