



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – December 4, 2021

The Lord be with you.

Do you have a favorite Christmas movie? Or maybe a favorite Christmas Story. I can't help but think of how many of the Christmas movies we love and the Christmas stories that they're about dark times and... About light breaking through the darkness. For instance, there's the beloved movie, It's a Wonderful Life with Jimmy Stewart playing poor old George Bailey who... Well, he's at the end of his rope, thinking about ending his life. There's Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol about the underpaid under-appreciated clerk, Bob Cratchet and his dying son, Tiny Tim. And there the citizens of Whoville waking about Christmas morning to discover that the Grinch has stolen all of their presents. Even a secular culture likes the story of a poor peasant baby born in a manger with a star and angels looking down. We love stories of redemption, stories of the light breaking through, and this past year has had plenty of darkness, hasn't it. The darkness of pandemic, the darkness of all the uncertainty about variants Delta and Omicron, and there's been a darkness of isolation, of violence, of unrest, of higher prices. Today, I wanna light a candle sorts, a candle for us with a passage of scripture that... Well, it's not just about darkness, it's about the darkest of times, and about God's presence with us.

I'm looking at Psalm 23, that's David's beloved Shepherd Psalm. Psalm 23, Verses 3 and 4, where David says, the Lord leads me in right paths for his namesake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me. We see in the Scripture, the light of God's presence and what David calls the darkest valley. It's not just a dark valley for David, it is the darkest valley for him. And David can testify to the Lord's presence with him in the darkest valley. Now, David talks about the Lord leading in right paths. I think sometimes we might fear that we're going around in circles, but know the Good Shepherd leads us in right paths for his name's sake, he leads us in paths that are actually going somewhere, and David says that sometimes those right paths lead us beside still waters. Sometimes right paths lead us to green pastures, and sometimes right paths lead us up to and through the darkest valley. Now, the Hebrew word here translated darkest as in darkest valley, it is translated in other scripture passages, as deepest darkness, thick darkness and Shadow of Death. This word is used in Psalm 107:10, it used of prisoners and dungeons of darkness, so darkness, use this word for life's deepest darkness, life's greatest troubles. And if you read the Bible history books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, you will see that many times David passed through dark, dark valleys, but David here says that he has learned that even in the darkest valley, I fear no evil, I fear no harm for you are with me.



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Now, please notice here the significant change of pronoun that takes place in this verse... As up to this point, David has been talking about the Lord about the Shepherd, talking about him in the third person, He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me besides still waters, he leads to me in right paths for His name sake. But when David comes to life's darkest valley, David here switches to the second person, he stops talking about the Lord and he starts talking to him, I fear no evil for you, you are with me. As a pastor and as a chaplain, and well, for my own life experience, I've seen again and again that is when we come to the darkest valley in life, that we stop just talking about the Lord, but we began talking to the Lord as his presence becomes more real for us than ever before, and I can look back on my own life and the lives of other people as well, who tell me that God draws us close to him in that darkest valley.

At Advent and Christmas, we often think of Jesus as Emanuel, God with us. For a virgin has conceived and born as a son, and his name is Emanuel, his significance is that He is God with us. I like how the Gospel of Matthew begins with the birth of the Emanuel and how the Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus promise to us that I am with you always, even to the end of the age. So we do not walk through this or through any darkest valley alone, Jesus is with us so that we can say, we fear no evil because He is with us. And notice that the Lord leads us through the darkest valley, he doesn't leave us stuck in the darkness.

Why not light an Advent candle today or tonight, and thank the Lord Jesus, Emanuel were being with us in our darkness, whether it is covid, loneliness, high prices, Jesus is truly Emanuel, God with us. We fear no evil.

Loving Father, we thank you for the profound meaning and beauty of these days of Advent and in the midst of darkness, in the midst of trouble, and hurry, we ask that you would calm our hearts that we might know the presence of Emanuel with us as your beloved Son became flesh and dwelt among us. Amen.

I'm Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening until next time.