



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – June 10, 2023

The Lord be with you.

It has been said that every major portion of the Bible was written by someone going through a difficult time, to someone going through a difficult time. Now I don't know whether or not that's always true, but I do know that those passages of the scripture that we love the most that those are the ones we turn to in time of trouble, and I don't think there is a passage of scripture that is more loved or more familiar to people today, than the passage I want to meditate on briefly today, and that is Psalm 23. The beloved shepherd psalm.

And as a chaplain in hospice, as a chaplain at the Mayo Clinic, as a chaplain in prison, and as a pastor, I have been asked to read Psalm 23, hundreds of times by people in trouble in dark times, and I myself... Well, I use this psalm to pray myself to sleep, many a night. Psalm 23, I wanna first read it and then think aloud about the Psalm as this is a Psalm of David, a man who has lived much and done much, a man who has sinned greatly had been greatly forgiven. And as we look at the Psalm, it does suggest that David is writing in a time of trouble, in which David calls to mind how as a young man, he cared for his father's sheep and how he led the sheep to greener pastures and how he protected them, from lions and bears. Yes, you can read all about it in for Samuel Chapter 17, and David remembers being a shepherd caring for his sheep, and so David writes.

"The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures, where he gives me repose. Near restful waters, He leads me to revive my drooping spirit. He guides me along the right path. He is true to his name. If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You were there with your crook and your staff with these You give me comfort. You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes. You have anointed my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life. In the Lord's own house shall I dwell forever and ever."

Now, David, like most shepherds from the area around Bethlehem and the hills of Judea, he would during the winter and spring, he would graze his sheep there in the lowlands where the Jordan river drains into the Dead Sea, but when that hot summer heat comes, when temperatures could reach up into the high hundreds pasture land, it well, it dries up. And so David would move his sheep that very steep 12 miles or so from the lowlands to the highlands near Bethlehem, but for David to take his little flock to greener pastures would mean taking them through one of the deep, dark valleys that criss-crossed the Judean wilderness, and these rugged



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steep valleys were called valleys of darkness. I saw some of these valleys when I was in Israel last year, and there are places in those deep valleys where the sun never reaches, and there are bears and lions hiding in the shadows, ready to pounce, and a sudden rain can bring a flash of light like what we see in the washes here in our Arizona desert. And now sheep are skittish creatures, they are fearful and no, sheep is going to go through a valley of darkness, accept that the sheep has a shepherd to lead them, to care for them, to fight for them.

Well you ask a of the hills of Judea, you just ask him to show his arms and legs, and he can likely show you scars that he has received fighting the enemies of his flock. It's a rugged area, and so I think what David is saying to us, that is he has come down to one of the most dark and dangerous passages of his life that David says that he is facing it unafraid, because David knows that he has a shepherd who leads him, who guides him, who fights for him. I don't know if you noticed, but as I read this, suddenly halfway through the psalm, David switches from third person to second person, that is David begins the psalm talking about his shepherd, how the Shepherd provides for him, leads him cares for him. But as David comes to this valley of darkness, David stops talking about his Shepherd, and he begins talking to his Sheppard, I fear no evil because you are with me. And you know this is something that I've seen again and again in the lives of God's people, it's really, one of the joys of being a pastor, that when we come to our own valley of darkness, we stop just talking about the shepherd, and we find ourselves talking to the shepherd, as in life's dark valleys, God's presence with us becomes very real, more real than ever, before and then, did you notice that this psalm, that it begins and ends with the Lord. It begins, The Lord is my shepherd, and it ends with the Lord. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever. See this Psalm, it, it really means nothing without the Lord as our faith begins and ends with the Lord.

So I think probably the most important word in this psalm is a little word "my" as the Lord is my shepherd. To be able to say, The Lord is my shepherd. Let me tell you, it makes all the difference in our lives. I can know that the Lord is the good shepherd, but that one do me much good.s I can know that the Lord... Well, he's the only one in all the universe who can fully satisfy my deepest longings, but that's not gonna do me much good. I might've even memorized this psalm, but that would do me much good. But when I come to that time in life, when by faith, I say, The Lord is my shepherd, that makes all the difference in our lives. And when I say the Lord is my shepherd, that I can say with confidence, that is based on the promise of God and that I would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So if you've never done that before, what do it right now in prayer, take the Lord as your shepherd, as you say to him, You are my Shepherd, who might trust to always care for me, to lead me, to guide me, and to take me safely all the way home.

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