

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP IN THE VALLEY

A message from Psalm 23 preached by Daniel E. Parks on April 12, 2023
during the funeral service of his mother, Louise Hemric Parks (6.26.1929-4.5.2023)

The wee lamb was lost. But the Good Shepherd came to seek and to save those who are lost. And He is 100% successful in doing so. He did not fail in this instance. He ascended and descended hills, crossed valleys, forded streams, traversed thickets, and endured the heat of day and the cold of night until He found her. He called her by name – for He knows all His sheep by name – and told her, “Wee lamb, you are mine! And I have come to take you to My fold.” He tenderly picked her up, placed her across His shoulders, secured her feet with His hands, and trekked back to the fold. He there shouted, “Rejoice with me, for I have found My sheep who was lost!” They and He rejoiced greatly. And so did the angels around God’s throne in heaven.

The wee lamb faithfully followed the Good Shepherd until she became an old ewe. She followed Him daily in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. She followed Him daily to green pastures, where the grass was so abundant that she could graze while lying down. She followed Him daily to still waters, where her thirst was quenched with the water of life.

And He restored her soul every time she experienced sadness or grief.

One day the Good Shepherd said to the old ewe, “Come with Me one last time.”

The old ewe replied, “Good Shepherd, you know I would if I could. But I cannot. My aged body is so feeble and frail, and so afflicted with many infirmities, that I cannot arise.”

The Good Shepherd said, “I carried you when you were a wee lamb, and I can carry you now.” He then stooped and picked her up, set her on her feet, and said “We will hold onto each other. Let us go.”

Off they went into another path of righteousness. But this time they passed the green pasture without stopping. They passed also the still water without stopping. Then they began descending into a valley that became darker and drearier with every step.

“Good Shepherd,” she said, “You have never brought me this way before. What is this dark and dreary place?”

The Good Shepherd replied, “Yes, I have never brought you this way before. And I will take you through this place only once. For this is the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It is the deepest valley there is, for it is deep as Sheol. It is a valley of death, for you have now come to the end of your earthly life. But the death in this valley is only a shadow for all who cross it with Me. And a shadow never harmed anyone. And this shadow is but a temporary shade that will end in My Father’s house of everlasting light on Mount Zion at the other side.”

“Good Shepherd,” she asked, “how will we find our way in this dark and dreary place?”

The Good Shepherd replied, “I crossed this valley alone many years ago and blazed a trail through it. I know the location of every precipice and abyss, and of every snare and trap, and will safely guide you around them. I have ushered many sheep through this valley, and never lost one in it. In fact, I ushered your husband through this valley a few years ago. You will be glad to know that he is waiting for you on the other side.”

And she was indeed gladdened to hear this!

Then she was frightened by the sounds of snarling and growling. “What is that?” she exclaimed.

The Good Shepherd replied, “Do not fear! You hear Satan and his impious fiends. They devour all who enter this valley without Me.” Then He extended His staff to keep them at bay. And He shook his rod at them until they cowered away in fear. Then the Good Shepherd and the old ewe continued on their journey.

Then she heard people talking behind her. “Who are they?” she asked.

The Good Shepherd replied, “You hear Goodness and Mercy. They have followed you all the days of your life to prevent evil from overtaking you. But you are more keenly aware of their presence now than ever before.”

Then the Good Shepherd and the old ewe forded the icy stream in the bottom of the Valley of the Shadow of Death and began ascending Mount Zion.

The old ewe said, “Good Shepherd, I am famished, and cannot continue without some nourishment.”

So the Good Shepherd prepared a table there in the midst of her enemies – Satan and his hellish fiends. And He spread on the table a sumptuous feast of the dainties of heaven – milk and honey and bread. Then He put before her a goblet and began pouring into it heavenly wine that gladdens the heart. He poured and He poured until she exclaimed “Good Shepherd, my cup is overflowing!”

The Good Shepherd replied, “Fear not! For this wine is from the cellars of My Father’s house, where the vats are always full and the supply is never diminished.”

Then He said, “No sadness can enter my Father’s house. And I can see that you still have some.” He then produced a cruse and began pouring from it the oil of gladness on her head. It made her countenance glisten and her heart merry.

Then they continued their journey. Their path was becoming brighter step by step. For they were nearing the heavenly Father’s house, where there is never darkness.

When they reached His house, the Good Shepherd opened the door and brought her into it. There she saw the heavenly hosts of both angels and saints around God’s throne. And she was blessed to see God who cannot be seen with earthly eyes.

She gazed upon all the glorious scene around her and then said:

“The Lord Jesus Christ has been my Shepherd! I never lacked what I needed.

“When I was hungry, He made me graze in lush green pastures.

“When I was thirsty, He made me drink from deep still waters.

“When I was saddened or grieved, He restored my soul.

“He led me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake, and never led me in a wrong way.

“He just now walked with me through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Yes, we *walked* in it, never running or stumbling. And yes, we walked *through* it, safely and soundly all the way.

“I feared no evil in that valley. For His rod and staff comforted me when my enemies approached me.

“He even prepared a sumptuous feast for me in the midst of that valley, and made my cup overflow, and anointed my head with oil.

“Surely Goodness and Mercy have followed me all the days of my life.

“And now I will live in Jehovah’s house forever.”

And she will!

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Friend, what you have just heard is, and will be, the testimony of God’s people, the sheep of Jesus Christ. You can read their testimony in the twenty-third Psalm. I hope and pray their testimony is your testimony, and that you are a follower of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For you surely would not want to be found in the valley by yourself, without the Good Shepherd. If you are not a follower of Jesus, begin following Him now. Do not walk out the doors of this chapel until you have believed His gospel and trusted in Him for your salvation. Then you can faithfully say “The Lord Jesus Christ is my Shepherd; and I will dwell in Jehovah’s house forever.”