

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

INTRODUCTION

A new year always brings hope and opportunities. Many see it as an opportunity to make a fresh start and make New Year's resolutions. A new year also brings new challenges and trials. We have begun this year with a lot of uncertainty because of the virus crisis. We may not know what the future holds, but we certainly Know Who holds us in His hands. We have a Great Shepherd who loves us and who will be our help this year. We read about this in Psalm 23:

Psalm 23 (NKJV) The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 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. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

We need the Lord to be our Shepherd, more so than ever, as we enter the year 2021.

I wrote this when I asked the Lord for His word concerning 2021:

"The key for year 2021 is to keep your eyes firmly fixed on Me. Those who have their eyes on Me will not fail, I will not let them down. I will lead you through these troubled times. This is not a season to drift. To stray off My path in this season will have eternal consequence. Time is short and whoever strays may not have the time to return to Me where I wait with open arms. Stay with Me, I am your shelter in these tumultuous times. This crisis will remain for a season, but during this time I will reveal My hand to My people who trust in Me and who call upon My name. Don't be troubled by those believers who have passed on, they are with Me, daily in my presence. As for you, push forward, run with endurance, run to win. I love you."

Today we will have a closer look at Psalm 23 and how it will help us to have a safe, victorious and blessed year.

MESSAGE

Psalm 23 is very personal. There are no references to "we" or "us" or "they," but only "my" and "me" and "I" and "You". This is David's testimony, his personal experience with God. This psalm covers all of life, it speaks of green pastures and still waters as well as dark valleys and enemies and adversities.

Notice that in the first three verses, David speaks about God: "The Lord is my Shepherd. He makes me lie down . . . He leads me . . . He restores my soul." He is speaking **about God**.

Then, in v. 4-5, David shifts, **speaking to God** personally: "I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me . . . You anoint my head with oil."

Why does David switch from talking about God using "He" to talking to God using "You", and why does it happen in v. 4? Why didn't he just go on to say, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for He is with me; His rod and His staff, they comfort me"?

Is it possible that the change from "He" to the more intimate "You" happens in v. 4 precisely because it's there he speaks of the valley of the shadow of death? Verse 4 describes the crisis points in his life, and in those times, something deep happened between him and God.

Have you possibly had the same experience? We seem to be more likely to talk about God when we are in the green pastures, but when trouble and darkness comes, we speak to God instead. In the light, we are prone to wander off in pursuit of greener grass. But in the dark, we remain as close to Him as possible.

David changed from comments about God to communion with God because during his valley time, he stayed ever so close to the Shepherd, never taking his eyes off Him. He had experienced God in a way there that had ushered him to an intimate trust and relationship the Great Shepherd.

Where are you at this morning? Have you begun this year close to the Great Shepherd or are you wandering around looking for greener pastures? The prophetic word has told us that this is not a good time to stray off the right path.

GOD SOMETIMES LEADS US INTO THE VALLEY

In the first four verses of Ps. 23, David uses the gentle picture of a shepherd with his sheep to describe the relationship God has with us and we with Him. Everything makes sense in our understanding of a shepherd leading his flock to green grass and calm waters. Then we get to v. 4, and it doesn't fit. Suddenly the psalm is speaking about valley of the shadow of death. Here the sheep are in a dangerous situation where a sheep's life is in danger unless the shepherd is alert and attentive.

But why would a sheep be going through such a place? Not because he strayed off in sin; that is not the point here, because the shepherd is pictured as going with the sheep not snatching him back to the pasture he left behind. No, the reason the sheep is going through the valley is because the shepherd led him there.

The connection between vs. 3 and 4 confirm this: The path through the valley is also one of the paths of righteousness in which God leads. "He guides me in

paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me . . . "

But why would a good shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep lead a lamb into a valley filled with danger and death threats? There's only one possible answer: "To get to some better place!"

Philip Keller, an Australian shepherd writes this about Psalm 23:

"The shepherd knows that predators like bears, wolves, or cougars can take cover in these broken cliffs and from their vantage point prey on his flock. He knows these valleys can be subject to sudden storms and flash floods that send walls of water rampaging down the slopes. There could be rockslides, mud, or ... a dozen other natural disasters that would destroy or injure his sheep. But in spite of such hazards he also knows that this is still the best way to take his flock to the high country. He spares himself no pains or trouble or time to keep an eye out for any danger that might develop."... When you are facing a valley, remember this:

Your Shepherd has appointed even this hard time as one of His paths of righteousness. He is leading you through this valley for reasons that probably won't be apparent. But rest assured, He is taking you to the high country, where the sun is warm and the grass is lush. Every valley is pathway to something better. As Psalm 84:11 says, "No good does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly." Or as Paul put it, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom . 8:28). The valley isn't good, but the Shepherd is. He knows the way."

While we are led through this valley of the shadow of death, we can remain confident that our Shepherd, Jesus Christ has something better in mind for us.

THE SHEPHERD IS WITH US, THEREFORE WE NEED NOT FEAR

In Psalm 23:4, David says, "Even 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."

The way to get victory over fear is to realise that we are not alone, our Shepherd is with us. His protective rod and staff give the sheep comfort.

Romans 8:31 (NKJV) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Hebrews 13:5b-6 says it like this: "He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

Jesus is with us. His presence will comfort us as travel through this dark valley of covid in 2021. We may face other challenges too. Our Shepherd is not only with us when covid is around, He is with us all the time!

WE HAVE DIVINE GUIDANCE AND PROTECTION

The shepherd's staff had a crook on the one end. Its purpose was to hook around a straying sheep's head and draw them back to the safety of the flock.

- The prophetic warning we have for 2021 is that it's a dangerous time to stray from God's presence. We need to remain close and we need to ask the Lord to keep us close.

The rod on the other hand was used as a weapon to chase of wild animals.

We are totally safe when God is for us. He is our refuge and our strong tower in the day of trouble.

As we walk out into this New Year, we have the Great Shepherd caring for us. We have already faced uncertain times during this pandemic. There are so many voices saying, "do this" or "do that", others are fear mongers, telling us of all the plans of the evil one, the mark of the beast, nano technology that can control us, vaccines that are meant for evil rather than good. This is typical of the devil's tactics. He wants to drive us to make the wrong decisions through deception and fear. We will face times when we simply don't know what to do. This is when we need to look to our Shepherd Who is with us. He will guide us and show us the way. He will keep us from making the wrong decisions and choices and when the enemy comes in against us, our Shepherd will be right there to lead us in the right direction and protect us from harm.

When we don't know what to do, Jesus does know. All we have to do is say, "Lord, please let Your rod and staff comfort me, direct me on the correct path".

WHAT IF THE ENEMY IS BEHIND ALL OF THIS?

The enemy definitely has an agenda. It is to steal, kill and destroy, but Jesus has a better agenda, He came to give us abundant life and He has won the battle already.

So, what if this is the New World Order's plan to reset society. What if this is a time leading to the mark of the beast. What if this virus is an elaborate scheme to reduce the world population and take control of the world?

We have an amazing promise in **Psalm 23:5**, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over".

- If we are willing to trust the Great Shepherd, He will bless us despite the enemy's plans.
- We will feast in God's presence while the enemy watches.
- God will give us special treatment, anointing us as His special guests at His table of blessing and provision.
- In a time of lack, our cup will run over – we will have more than enough.

But, Jesus also warned in the parable of the wedding feast about many who were invited but didn't come. Are you willing to accept His invitation to His special feast? We might be in the presence of the enemy, but instead of famine, we will feast.

2021 A SEASON OF CONTINUAL BLESSING

Psalm 23:6 (NKJV) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

This speaks of God's continuous goodness and mercy that follows us every day of our life.

Regardless of our circumstances, regardless of what is going on in the world around us, we can declare, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life".

- We receive that goodness and mercy because of the work of our Great Shepherd on the cross.
- All we need to do is believe in Him and He will ensure that we continually experience His goodness and receive His grace.
- We can also look forward to a better future because there waits for us a house where we will dwell with the Lord forever.

David experienced the reality of God's continued goodness and mercy. He declared that it would always follow him. Let us make the same confession today. When the enemy comes with his trials and troubles let us face them with faith and boldly declare. "I will experience God's goodness and mercy throughout this storm".

Let us declare over the year 2021 and all that it holds, "this will be my season of continual blessing".

CONCLUSION

When we find ourselves weak, in the dark, uncertain of the future, it's time to fix our eyes on Jesus, our Good Shepherd and remain close to Him. Trust that He knows the way through this valley and will see us safely through. Believe that He has good reasons for taking this route, even though it is hard and unfamiliar. And hold on to the truth that there is something better waiting on the other side of this valley.

David was supremely confident, not only about his present circumstances, but of grace in the future that would see him all the way home. He believed that

valley times were appointed for His good. He learned things about God that could be learned no other way in the deep ravines of life. He stayed close, trusted in God's protection and guidance all the way. He knew what it was to feast in the presence of his enemies and he often praised God for His goodness and mercy.

All because he could say, "The Lord is my shepherd." Let us declare today, and over this New Year 2021, "The Lord is my Shepherd".