“The Shepherd and His Sheep:

Walking through the Valley”

**Psalm 23:1-4 (see also 1 Samuel 17)**

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 11/28/21)

The 23rd Psalm takes us from mountain top to mountain top. The psalm begins with, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” and it ends with, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” It begins with the mountain top of intimacy with God Himself, and ends with the mountain top reminder that we will soon be with our Shepherd and all of His sheep… forever! But, dear friends, the Christian life is not always lived on the mountain top… (Q1)

 Read Psalm 23:4 again. All who live righteously for the glory of God must journey through dark valleys. This shadow of death can take various forms. It can be the crisis that comes when you face physical death. It has been said that death doesn’t frighten God’s people… it’s just the dying part! The shadow of death can also be anything over which sin casts its ugly shadow. The shadow of death carries reminders:

* Sickness- these old bodies won’t last forever
* Persecution- we see it in employment in the U.S., and even in matters of life and death in other countries
* Old age- loneliness, pain, mourning the death of a loved one. The shadow being cast is a long one.

We’re not always on the mountain top, are we?

 Why does God lead His sheep through gloomy valleys? To take us to the high, green, summer pastures. If we’re going to get to higher ground with God, we’ll just have to go through some low valleys. Growth comes from following God wherever He leads, through blessing or trouble.

 1 Samuel 17 opens with the Philistines taunting God’s people. There’s a real shadow of gloom cast over the armies of Israel. But young David doesn’t focus on the gloom, he focuses on God’s glory. Here’s the point: It’s possible to journey through life’s gloom without being a gloomy person!

 The whole world, apart from God’s redemption, is a gloomy place. But your whole Bible proclaims Christmas! The Good Shepherd has come! (Isa. 9:2; Luke 1:77-79) Peace with God, through the work of Jesus, is made possible for you. Sin and its curse are conquered by the Good Shepherd for His people. All who repent and believe and follow Jesus are fellow conquerors of sin and death. Even on the gloomiest day I know I am cherished and Heaven bound! Is the Lord **your** Shepherd? Don’t leave here today wondering about this. (Q2)

 A shadow cannot harm you. A shadow implies the nearness of a source of light. A shadow is actually a reminder of God’s nearness. (Q3) Verse 4 continues with, “I will fear no evil.” Yes, David killed Goliath, but he also ran from Saul and other thugs. And of course, we, too, will experience fear. But the key is what our faith does with our fear (see Ps. 56:3). When we look to the light of our Good Shepherd, our debilitating fear of evil is displaced by living faith in our Shepherd’s goodness. (Q4) His paths for you are never sloppily chosen. Every path is purposeful and well-chosen for you. His intentions for you are always good. God is not the author of evil, but He often uses it to accomplish His ways (Gen. 50:20-21).

 How does one keep walking by faith, knowing that the dark valleys are coming? Life’s valleys are not merely inevitable; they are necessary for a Christian’s maturity (1Peter 1:6-7). Life’s valleys are not a destination; they are a pathway to Christian maturity that brings glory to God. Remember that these valleys are purposeful and they are temporary. Another word of advice: don’t stop and get bogged down in the valley. Walk by faith; don’t stop in fear. Thank God for the fellowship of other Christians and the reminders of communion and baptism that can get us up and moving again on those paths of righteousness.

 When David says, “You are with me,” it’s very personal. He knows that the darker the valley, the closer the Shepherd’s touch. The Silent Shepherd, the Holy Spirit, assures us of His presence and power and faithfulness and goodness. His rod and staff comfort us, letting us know that we won’t get snatched away. His rod and His staff are even there to keep us from running away (Philip. 1:6). With His Holy Spirit, God exposes things in our hearts that should not be there. He uses His staff to defend and also to correct. And when He corrects, run to Him! His work for His sheep is always good.

 We don’t get to decide which valleys we go through. Whether the Good Shepherd’s aim is to protect, correct, or inspect, His intentions for you are always good. Don’t concentrate on your dark valley; concentrate on your Good Shepherd who loves you so very much. Father, work in us so that we stay close to You. We will follow you anywhere. Amen.

**QUESTIONS**:

1. What causes us to fall out of intimacy with God? What can be done about this?
2. What dark valley did the Good Shepherd walk through for His sheep?
3. A shadow can only form if there is a source of light. How does this help you understand how David overcame his fear?
4. **WHY** is fear debilitating? Why does scripture memorization knock fear off its block? How can the body of Christ help each other in this battle against fear?

“Joy to the World” (Isaac Watts)

1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let ev’ry heart prepare him room
and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n and nature sing,
and heav’n, and heav’n and nature sing.

4 He rules the world with truth and grace
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.