

path, and to lift them out of the pit if they fell. He sometimes rapped a disobedient sheep sharply with the staff. But even God's disciplinary dealings are among His greatest mercies. <sup>(Brumfield)</sup>

#### a. Our Shepherd carries a rod and staff

- 1) George Mackie in his book *Bible Manners and Customs* describes the shepherd's *rod* as a short oak club made from a young oak tree trunk with the root ball forming the club with protruding nails. The handle had a hole in the end with a short rope attached. In a time of danger, it hung from his wrist for ready use. The shepherd used the rod as a weapon against wild animals.
- 2) Mackie then says that the *staff* also of oak was about 1.8m long, and rarely had a crook on the end. The shepherd used the staff to aid climbing, for handling the sheep, and for chastening wayward sheep and fighting goats.

#### b. Our Shepherd's rod and staff give comfort

- 1) The shepherd's rod and staff were a great comfort to the sheep. The rod protected them from danger and the staff kept them from going astray.
- 2) Our Good Shepherd does not literally carry a rod and staff, yet He performs their duties.
  - a) He **protects** us from too much temptation (1Co 10:13), from the devil (Jas 4:7), and from loss of salvation (1Pe 1:5).
  - b) He lovingly **corrects** us when we sin (Pr 3:11-12), and He **guides** us along life's way (Ps 31:3).
- 3) Knowing that God lovingly protects us and keeps us in line is a great comfort to our souls.

**Conclusion:** Yes, life is full of valleys. Many are dark and fearful with the shadow of death. Yea, though we walk through such valleys, we should fear no evil or worry about the unknown. Our Shepherd is with us. He will bring us safely through. Even when He allows death to strike, it is not because He could not prevent it, but because He has a wiser plan. We must take comfort in God's rod and staff knowing that with them He protects, corrects and guides us.

**Song:** Surely Goodness and Mercy **292** #3

# Psalm 23:4

19 August 2018 PM - Psalm 23:4 - Ps23 - Scott Childs

**Introduction:** As a shepherd, there were times when David had to lead his sheep through a dangerous valley to a paddock on the other side.

**Transition:** This evening as we walk with David through the treacherous valley, we will learn truths about our Shepherd that can encourage us. Phillip Keller in his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, tells us that shepherds often take their sheep to distant paddocks for the summer and then return closer to home in the autumn. Paths to those distant pastures often lead through narrow valleys along rushing rivers and near hiding places of wild animals.

## 1. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

### a. Notice the word "yea".

- 1) It means even, also or indeed.
- 2) Indeed, there will be times that we must walk through the valleys of life. Walking through the valleys is necessary in order to reach the better pastures on higher ground.
- 3) The shepherd will never lead his sheep through a valley of danger if he were not confident that it was for the betterment of his flock.
- 4) Yes, our Good Shepherd will lead us through valleys that we may not enjoy, but He knows it is for our benefit.
- 5) If ever a godly man walked through a terrible valley, it was Job. Though at times Job's miserable anguish overpowered him, in his heart he knew God was at work. (Job 23:10) "*But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*" At the end of Job, we learn that God did bring Job through as purified gold. God makes no mistakes!

### b. Some valleys have a *shadow of death*

- 1) The shepherd's path sometimes leads through valleys. The Hebrew word means valley, a steep valley, or narrow gorge. Such paths are narrow and darkened by the canyon walls.

- 2) David did **not** say that walking through such valleys **always led to death**. If a shepherd always lost every sheep when he led them through the valley of the shadow of death, he would have no flock. Rather, David said that the valley had a shadow of death. The Hebrew word means **deep shadow** or **deep darkness** or **death shadow**. It was dark and dangerous. On either side of the narrow valley were caves and holes where ravenous beasts hid. (Evans) These could take the life of a sheep.

✧ *Henry W. Longfellow* *There is no flock, however watched and tended, But one dead lamb is there! There is no fireside, howso'er defended, But has one vacant chair!*

- 3) Yes, some valleys are dangerous and **may** even lead to death. Such valleys are narrow and must be walked in single file – one sheep at a time. For those **without** Christ, the path through the valley of death is the most dreaded path of all. They have no peace and no hope.
- 4) However, for a Christian, the path through the valley of death does not lead to hopelessness. It is the beginning of eternal life with the Lord. (Psalms 116:15) "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*" Paul said, (Philippians 1:21) "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*" Because Christ arose, we too will be resurrected to eternal life. (1 Corinthians 15:57) "*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 15:54) "... *Death is swallowed up in victory.*"
- 5) Often in the fearful, deep, dark, narrow valleys of life, the unknown frightens us more than real enemies. We worry about the "**what if**" beasts that may attack us. When we worry, we sin against God who said, (Philippians 4:6-7) "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" (Proverbs 3:5-6) "*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy*

*paths.*" *May God help us to trust Him!*

## 2. I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

### a. Even in dark valleys, sheep **need not** fear

- 1) A good shepherd loved and cared for his sheep. His sheep learned to trust him. Though tempted to fear, he led them through the dark valleys and they followed him.
- 2) When our Shepherd leads us through such frightening valleys, we need not fear. We must trust our Shepherd and follow Him through the dark valleys.
- 3) David killed a lion and a bear that were threatening his sheep. He was willing to give his life for his sheep. Our divine Shepherd has unlimited power. Our enemy Satan fears God. (James 4:7) "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"
- 4) When our Shepherd allows sickness or death, He does not view it as evil. It is within His perfect plan. Therefore, we should not fear those trials. (Psalms 27:1) "*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*"

### b. We **need not** fear because the LORD is **with us**

- 1) A shepherd always carefully checks the path through the dark valley before leading his sheep through. Then he always goes through the valley with them.
- 2) The LORD our Shepherd knows exactly what lies in the path of our dark valley. (Psalms 139:11-12) "*If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*" God has never been surprised or caught off guard. As we walk through that dark valley, He is right there beside us. He does not forsake us in those dark hours. He said in Hebrews 13:5, "... *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"

## 3. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

The Shepherd carried two instruments, the *rod* [for protection] was a short club to protect the sheep from any beast that might attack them; the *staff* [for correction] was for the sheep themselves. It was the shepherd's crook to guide them if they wandered from the