

TRAVELING THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

As Psalm 23 begins we have an unbelievable promise. “I shall not want.” Do you fathom what that entails?? I shall not want for anything — joy, peace, understanding, health, friends, companionship and our desires left in the valley as we trudge through this dark night of the soul???

You will notice the promise is prefaced with the “if the Lord is my shepherd”. How many of you already know that we by nature are goats that will not be shepherded and it is not until we have our walk through the valley of the shadow of death that we have a change of nature? It is in this valley we learn obedience by the things that we suffer. It is in this valley where we learn the meaning of charity, compassion and serving one another. It is in this valley we are harvested like a cluster of grapes and all relationships come to an end to be re-related in the green pastures and by the still waters. It is in this valley we become servants rather than lords. It is this valley we die out to the lusts of this world. It is in this valley we obtain the wisdom it takes to build God’s house. Yes, it is this valley of tears most sojourners will avoid and go back to their vomit, i.e. — their old personality, their old habit patterns, their bitchy mouth, the snares of the world — rather than suffer to the death of the soul.

So, the “I shall not want” will be the reward of allowing the Lord to be our shepherd. And the Lord becomes our shepherd as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death where we die and yet we live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.

He maketh me, He leadeth me, He restoreth my soul, He comforts me, He prepares a table. In our hour when God seems to be no more, in reality, He is ever present and we find we are the ones who become “no more” as we die out to all and become a new creation. Let us ponder the scripture. **He maketh me.** Oh, I thought I was the one who decided to lie down. HOW we all rebel against submitting our will to His. How many of us did our little works for Jesus with our own will and our own spirit?? In this valley, we submit unto death to the One who maketh us to lie down.

He leadeth me. Have you come to the place in your journey where you have allowed the Lord to be the leader or are you still arrogant and stubborn refusing to be led to the slaughter as a dumb lamb opening not your mouth? As we walk through the valley — yes, I said, “through the valley,” no one or nothing can really comfort us. We are born alone and we die alone. Blessed are those who die gracefully for they shall be comforted.

Psalm 22 describes the agony and the ecstasy of the valley of the shadow of death as we overcome death by dying.

This great and terrible experience takes place in the valley as we overcome death. Psalm 22 is definitely not for sissies.

“My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me” is the cry of the bewildered as he gives up his life to be born anew. “I cried, you did not answer”; “I am a worm and not a man”. These are the cries as vanity and ego and hopes and dreams are burned to the ground never to be returned. “All they that see me laugh and shake their head saying, he trusted in the Lord, now look at him. “I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint, my heart is like wax, my strength is dried up.” Let me add a few of my own. “I have no motivation for living. I will never laugh or smile again. Where is the feeling of satisfaction one gets from doing a day’s work?? Woe is me, I am a pile of dung.” Now let us proceed on to Psalm 23.

Let us jump ahead to the garden of Gethsemane and see the travail and giving up the ghost of our example, Jesus. First, the begging God to take away the cup of suffering that would ultimately take his will and his life. And then the giving in to the only One who could save

him. And He died gracefully and without fanfare while His disciples slept.

Now let us travel this lonely road using Paul's description of this valley as He describes the way into the resurrection. First, he tells us of our predicament.

We see in part, speak in part and understand in part and think in part. In other words we have an "in part God". In this valley, our "in part" God is taken from us and we become whole with God as our Father. My little sweetsie babies, God never forsakes us even though for a short time He seems to have done just that.

In my darkest hour, He fed me, clothed me, comforted me, cried with me and heard my travail. Yes, the Lord has become my Shepherd, my wants and desires have been crucified and He has made me whole. His abundant life is far surpassing all I had ever hoped for. The contentment, the fellowship of a family of believers, the works and ability to carry out His will for my life goes beyond any mortal words of gratitude. For within my walls of salvation He has created within me a grateful heart that sings His praises as spontaneously as breathing, for He is indeed, my **BREATH OF LIFE** and I shall live in the house of the Lord forever.



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