**Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me**

**Psalm 23:4 -- “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”**

**Review**: After walking with God for many years, David, in his old age, looks back upon his life and testifies that “The LORD is my shepherd!” (Psalm 23:1)

In verse 2 of this Psalm David speaks of the Lord who provided David with the peace, comfort, and the satisfaction of soul that comes with God's salvation.

In verse 3 David testifies that his Shepherd restored his soul!

When we studied the Hebrew word that is translated into our English word – **restoreth** – we found out that the Shepherd

**recovers** our soul from death and destruction.

**relieves** our soul in its distresses

**revives** us when we are in spiritual decline

**refreshes** us when we are weary

**restores** us when we wander

We also learned that with divine restoration, God always leads his sheep into the paths of righteousness!

**The Shepherd leads His Sheep into many different paths of righteousness:**

He leads His Sheep to the place of imputed righteousness by grace through repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He leads His Sheep into **paths of fellowship** and communion with God (Enoch)

He leads His Sheep into **paths of faith** (Abraham)

He leads His Sheep into the **path of forsaking** this world to follow the Lord Jesus Christ (Moses)

He leads His Sheep into **paths of obedience** to His will.

He leads His Sheep into **paths of love** – for God and for their neighbor

He leads His Sheep into **paths of chastening** which yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness

**He leads into paths which lead to Heaven.**

**Last week, we also saw that the Shepherd oftentimes leads His Sheep into paths with are often times uncomfortable.**

In verse 4 David speaks of the times when his Shepherd led him into areas filled with darkness and shadows.

**First: I walk** --The sheep walk in places where their Shepherd leads them. Therefore we must conclude that they have been led into the valley with all its shadows and all its potential terrors.

In this Psalm, David speaks of **walking** -- confidently – quietly – and patiently - through the valley in which his Shepherd is leading.

 **“Through the Valley”** – **It is not a dark and trying place which can be avoided.** The pathway to the celestial city runs through many such valleys. **It is not a place which affords the sheep with short cuts**.

**David oftentimes walked in the valley of the shadow of death** – the word **death** refers to all that potentially separates from God - the life source - of all creatures and the spiritual life source of the elect sheep. Yet, at the same time, there are some good aspects of the word death because our God works all things together for our good. (**Romans 8:28**)

**The Shepherd teaches us that there are many aspects of death**.

**Before and after we became Christians we learned that sin brings us into valleys** which have the shadow of death over them.

**James 1:15** – “… sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

**As a Christian we know that times of spiritual declension (when god feels as though He is not near to us) are a kind of death to us**.

**Psalm 118:18** – “(18) **The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.**”

**As a Christian we learn that the Shepherd leads us to experience death over our self-will --** more selfless service for our Saviour.

**II Corinthians 4:11-12** – “(11) For **we which live are alway delivered unto death** for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. (12**) So then death worketh in us**, but life in you.”

**“I will fear no evil; for thou art with me”** -- The confidence of the sheep is not found in themselves. It is the nature of sheep to be easily frightened.

David can make this statement – not because he was a mighty warrior – not because he is king in Israel – not because he has been responsible for defeating all Israel’s enemies --- but because **his Shepherd was with him** in those things and in every day of his life.

**He is with us as we face trials** -- **Isaiah 43:2** – “When thou passest through the waters, **I will be with thee** …”

**He is with us as we serve Him – Matthew 28:19-20** – “(19) Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (20) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

**He is always with us -- Hebrews 13:5** – “…he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

**Begin: Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me** --

The rod and the staff are both basic tools used by the Shepherd for the benefit of the sheep.

The sheep know their shepherd – they know the Shepherd loves them. They also know the way He uses His tools in their behalf.

The comfort concerning the rod and the staff is derived from the knowledge that the Shepherd loves his Sheep and He will use the rod and the staff for their good.

**“Thy rod”** – It is an instrument in the hands of the Shepherd used for the good of the Sheep.

**First: The Rod is sometimes used as a Measuring Rod to determine that which belongs to the LORD.**

**Leviticus 27:32** – “And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the **rod**, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD.”

Though This verse refers to the physical tithe as it was given in the nation of Israel – yet there is a spiritual application to this precept.

**Compare**: **Ezekiel 20:37** – “And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:”

In this verse we learn that God brings those into covenant relationship with Him through the spiritual practice of causing them to pass under the rod. In other words, God has those who are His portion just like the physical tithe belongs to God as His portion.

Those who are included in the salvation provided by the person and work of Jesus Christ in the New Covenant are said to be His Tithe (His portion).

**Example**: **Isaiah 6:8-13** – “(8) Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. (9) And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. (10) Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. (11) Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, (12) And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. (13) **But yet in it shall be a tenth** …”

The elect are called “a tenth” in this verse. That does not mean that God only determined to save ten percent of Israel or of the world. Rather it refers to that which is God’s portion.

**New Testament Reference**: **Romans 11:5-6** – “(5) Even so then at this present time also **there is a remnant according to the election of grace**. (6) And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”

The remnant according to the election of grace is the LORD’s portion. They will be His by His grace!

**Second: The Rod sometimes refers to a Ruling Rod** – referring to the Lord’s righteous rule over His Sheep.

**Psalm 45:6** – “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre (rod) of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.”

**Note**: Our Shepherd’s rod is not only used to rule His Sheep, but He uses it to rule over our enemies – to defend His Sheep from their enemies.

**Sometimes it is used in as an instrument in judgement; sometimes in deliverance; and sometimes in provision.**

**It is called the Rod of God** -- **Exodus 4:20** – “Moses … returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.”

**It is sometimes a Rod of Judgment against our Enemies** - **Exodus 8:5** – “And the LORD spake … Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.”

**Psalms 2:9** -- “Thou shalt break them (all His enemies) with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

**It is sometimes a Rod of Protection** - **Exodus 14:16** – “…lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.”

**It is sometimes a Rod of Provision** - **Exodus 17:5-6** – “And the LORD said … Go on before the people, and take with thee … thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river … Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.”

Sometimes God uses it to correct and instruct those He loves - **Psalms 89:32** - “Then will **I visit their transgression with the rod** (correction and instruction), and their iniquity with stripes.”

**Proverbs 29: 15** that, “The rod and reproof give wisdom…”

**“Thy staff”** -- The Hebrew word which is translated into the English word **staff** simply means **a support of every kind**.

The staff was an instrument upon which men leaned and upon which they trusted as they walked. It is a picture of that in which men trust.

**Note**: it is sometimes used in a negative way to show the things that men ought not to trust in.

**Isaiah 3:1** – “For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and **the staff**, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water”

When Israel trusted in their prosperity and not in their God the prophet said that God took it away from them.

**Isaiah 36:6** – “Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him.”

When Israel looked for Egypt for help instead of God Egypt was called their staff. Because they trusted Egypt more than God – God eventually sent Israel into captivity and destroyed Egypt along with Israel.

**In the hand of our Shepherd – it is everything necessary to sustain our walk as a Christian!**

**It is sometimes called the Rod of God’s Strength -- Psalm 110:2** – “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion …”

**The Shepherd’s staff is a symbol of His stability** – Jesus Christ is strong and stabile in this life and in the life to come. He is always stable – We always weak and faltering!

**Isaiah 42:3-4** – “(4) A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench … (4) He shall not fail nor be discouraged …”

**The Shepherd’s staff is a symbol of trust** – Jesus Christ is the strong staff upon which we lean upon – and upon which we may put our whole trust.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** – “(5) Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (6) In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

**The Shepherd’s staff is a symbol of support** – Jesus Christ is the One who upholds us and supports us in all that we face on this side of glory.

**Isaiah 41:10** – “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Is He supporting you? Is He upholding you?