

Valleys Can Be Beautiful

BROADCAST DECEMBER 16

SCRIPTURE—Psalm 23

TEXT—*“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”*—Psalm 23:4

Out of Jewish folklore comes a beautiful story about David, the shepherd lad. At night he bedded down his sheep in a cave. Then to protect them he slept between them and the cave's entrance. He suspended his harp over the door of the cave. About an hour before dawn the wind, blowing directly into the cave, made music on the harp. Awakened by the music David would lie until dawn and meditate on the goodness of God toward him.

We may well imagine that it was at such a time that David composed the twenty-third psalm. He thought of himself as the shepherd of his sheep, and of all that he did for them from early dawn until late at night. Then the question came. “Who is my shepherd?” And just as quickly came the answer. “The Lord is my shepherd!” And then there unfolded in his soul all that God did for him, not merely through the day, but throughout life and beyond. Thus he gave to us the most beautiful and beloved of all the psalms.

Doctor Kyle M. Yates calls this psalm “a nightingale singing in the world's night of loneliness and need.” A nightingale's song is most beautiful

in the dark. And never does the “nightingale” among the psalms sing more beautifully than when it says, “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” (Psalm 23:4).

Some years ago we were driving from Jericho up to Jerusalem. Presently we drove into one of the wildest, most forboding valleys that I have ever seen. It was barren, with scarcely any suggestion of life. Jagged rocks jutted out from the sides of towering, ominous looking mountain crags. I thought of the robbers who waylaid a hapless traveller on this road centuries ago. A sense of uneasiness overtook me. The guide said, “This is the Valley of the Shadow of Death.” Unconsciously a shiver of revulsion swept over my body. And just as suddenly I knew a deep calm. For I thought of God, my Shepherd, who leads through the valleys. And then the foreboding scene was caught up in a blaze of glory, the glory of God. For then I knew the “Valleys Can Be Beautiful.”

As we consider this thought let us note, first, the valley; second, the vigil; third, the victory.

First, consider the valley . . . "the valley of the shadow of death." What does the psalmist mean by this phrase? Ordinarily we think of it as referring to death. And it may be, but not necessarily so. The word translated "shadow of death" means literally "Deep Shadow." It may, therefore, refer to any experience of life that is dark and foreboding. Thus in the course of your life there are many dark valleys in which you may walk.

It may be the valley of temptation where all of the powers of evil assail you. Or perhaps it is the valley of suffering, when it seems that you are called on to bear more than you can endure. Maybe it is disappointment when friends fail you, or when some cherished hope, like a wounded bird, flutters in the dust. It may be the "deep shadow" of loneliness, when loved ones are gone or are far away, and it seems that the world has passed you by. Sometimes it is the valley of frustration, when you have done your best in some noble task, and seemingly have failed. Or sooner or later it will be the valley of bereavement, as with heavy tread you carry the earthly remains of a loved one to the city of the dead.

Yes, from time to time each of us must walk in the valley of "deep shadows." There is an old proverb which says that there comes a time when each house will have its hush, or each life. The poet reminds us that

*Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.*

This is another way of saying that the valley of "deep shadows" is a part of life. It you expect to "lie down in green pastures" and to walk "beside still waters," you must anticipate also that you will be called upon to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death." To wish to be free from trou-

ble is to wish to be free from life. In the midst of his trials Job cried, "Why died I not from the womb? . . . for now I should have lain still, and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest" (Job 3:11, 13). To him it would have been better had he died at birth, rather than to have to face up to life.

Our Lord does not so will for us. Jesus prayed, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [one]" (John 17:15). To every one of His children He says, "In this world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Second, note the vigil. ". . . I will fear no evil: for thou art with me . . ." It would be terrifying indeed if we had to tread the dark valley alone. But David says, "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." So when you walk in the "deep shadows" there is One that keeps a vigil over you to guard and to keep you.

James Russell Lowell expresses it thusly.

*Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong
forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
and behind the dim unknwon,
Standeth God within the shadows,
keeping watch above His own.*

Now God does not will that there will be valleys of deep shadows. Sometimes they come through our own sins, or the sins of others. Again they simply exist because of the evil that is in the world. They may come through loss of health, property, friends, or some other unhappy circumstances. But whatever the cause, God does not intend that they shall be.

However, since these things do exist, God does not seal us off from the stern realities of life. In His

benevolent wisdom He permits us to walk in the valley. But He does not leave us to walk alone.

In a certain Indian tribe before a young man could become a "brave" he was required to spend a night alone and unarmed in the forest where vicious animals roamed. The time came for the son of the chief to endure this ordeal. Through the night the animals stalked him, snarling and hungry. The young man's body quivered with fear. Unarmed and alone he seemed to be at their mercy. But remembering the purpose of the ordeal he endured. And then just as dawn was breaking, and the animals slinked away to their lairs, the young Indian boy looked behind him to see his father quietly standing nearby, an arrow set in his bow.

Is not this what the psalmist is saying? God wisely does not exempt us from the trials of life. We may think that we face them alone. But, unseen by us, God keeps watch above His own.

This is the significance of the "rod" and "staff." The rod was a club used to fight off evil men and wild animals. The staff was the shepherd's crook with which he guided his sheep away from danger.

So when you are called upon to walk through the valley of "deep shadows," take courage. For if, with your eyes of faith, you peer through the gloom, you will behold your Shepherd walking before you. In His hand is His "rod," poised to strike out at those who would harm you. Or presently you see Him walking by your side with His shepherd's staff in hand. The way is narrow, and yawning chasms await but one misstep on your part. But the Shepherd knows the way. At times you feel His staff gently pressing your cheek to turn you from making a false, fatal step. At other times when you stumble

and the chasm reaches up to claim you, you feel the jerk of the Shepherd's crook, pulling you back from destruction to safety.

These blessed truths are best illustrated in the life of Job. God did not will that he should suffer. However, He permitted Satan to subject Job to trials in order to prove the character of His servant. But twice God said to Satan, "*You are permitted to do as much to Job, but no more*" (Job 1:12, 2:6). Always His "rod" was poised to limit the onslaught of Satan. And as Job passed through the valley, the "staff" of God guided him safely through the trial to glorious victory beyond (Job 42).

So God permits you to walk the darksome path. But in the trial He "is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted [tried] above that ye are able; but will with the temptation [trial] also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13).

Yes, "God is faithful" (I Cor. 10:13), and He calls on us to be faithful too.

Third, consider the victory. "... walk through the valley of the shadow of death . . ." "Through the valley Ah! there is the blessed truth of it all. We do not walk "into" the valley but "through" the valley. Sometimes it was necessary for the shepherd to lead his sheep through the valley in order to lead them into the green fields beyond.

In this you see the loving design of the Good Shepherd. Through the valley of temptation to moral character

WRITERS

N. Y. publisher wants books on all subjects, fiction, nonfiction. No fee for professional opinion. FREE: Brochures that show how your book can be published, publicized, sold; tips and article reprints on writing, publishing, contracts. Write Dept. B-1

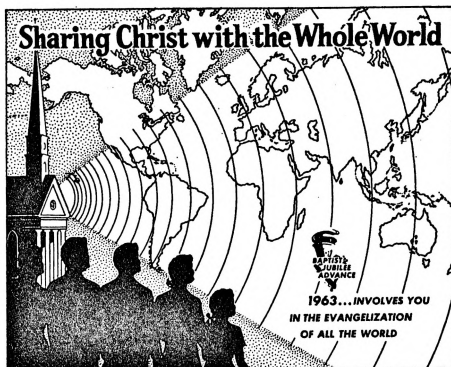
EXPOSITION 386 PARK AVE. S., N. Y. 16

beyond. Through sorrow to joy, through disappointment to faith and hope, through loneliness to His blessed companionship, through frustration to victory, through bereavement to consolation. Through the dark, foreboding shadows where danger lurks into the pleasant "house of the Lord for ever."

Now God's ways are not our ways, nor His time yours. If in His hour of suffering Jesus asked, "Why?" (Matt. 27:46), it is understandable that you may often ask. But, having asked, then trust Him to answer in His own time and way. As with Paul so with you, God may deem it best that you remain in the shadow. But he gives grace to bear (II Cor. 12:7-9). He will lead you to say with Paul, "*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" (v. 9).

Perhaps for you the way out is the way through. Your valley may truly be "the valley of the shadow of death." But, even then, as a child of God you need fear no evil, for He is with you. Note that David speaks of the "shadow of death." Death, then, is a "shadow." Now a shadow may frighten you. It may cause you to panic, and, therefore, hurt yourself. But a shadow cannot harm you.

So when you are called upon to tread this valley, just remember that you do not walk alone. The Good Shepherd walks before you. He has trod that way before, and triumphantly so. He knows the pitfalls and dangers. Just trust Him, and He will lead you through. Yes, "through the valley of the shadow of death." If you walk, He walks with you. If you falter, He lifts you up. Little lambs passing this way, He gathers into His bosom. And through the valley of dark shadows He bears them onto the vaulting heights of God's glory beyond.



Death is like a ship putting out to sea, bearing with it a loved one to the other shore. Loved ones stand and watch with tear-dimmed eyes as the ship grows smaller and smaller. Presently it is but a dot on the horizon. And then it disappears from view. Sad hearts turn away in resignation, saying, "There she goes!" But at the moment the ship disappears from the earthly view, it appears on the horizon of heaven. There eager eyes have been watching, waiting. And drowning out earth's sad words "There she goes" is the joyous shout of loved ones over there. "There she comes!" Soon the glad reunion with loved ones long since lost for a while but now gained forever. No more parting, no more sighing, no more tears, no more dark valleys.

But best of all—to see our Shepherd, our Pilot, face to face—when we have "crossed the bar."

Knife, Fork and Spoonerism

A CBS performer gave these directions for setting a table: "Place the sports and foons on the ..." Then he tried it once more: "I mean the sporks and sphoons ...!" Then he tried it a third time: "Of course I mean the porks and soons."