

We Are Going Down the Valley

Six times in the past four months I have seen friends of mine walk through the valley of the shadow of death and proceed into eternity. Two were my age while three others were close to my age. Each passing was a reminder that this is a walk that I myself will one day take unless the Lord returns in judgment first. "For it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). The thought of such would be disheartening were it not for one important truth. Waiting for me and for each faithful child of God at the entrance to that valley is the loving Shepherd, ready to lead us home.

"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). The fact that we walk through the valley indicates that the valley has an exit. We will not stay in it. We will just pass through. On the other side is the portal to Paradise where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 21:4). That the valley is the valley of the SHADOW of death also indicates that it is a brief passageway rather than a permanent dwelling place. Dying is an experience fraught with pain, darkness, sadness and danger. Its process often robs its victims of the freedoms and pleasures they once knew. Still, dying is only a shadow, and as shadows pass away with the rising of the sun, so also the shadow of death will pass away when we stand in the presence of the Son in heaven. "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." (Revelation 21:23).

There is abundant evil in the valley of the shadow of death, but the Shepherd is there with His rod to defend against the evil. The Hebrew word translated, "evil" in Psalm 23:4 means, "bad, disagreeable, malignant, displeasing, giving pain, unhappiness, misery, hurtful." Because of the Shepherd, faithful children of God need not fear the evil. Oh, the evil is going to attack. It will attack our faith, our hope, our love, our trust. It will attack our relationships. It will attack our hearts. We need to walk next to the Shepherd and allow Him to protect us. Trying to walk through the valley alone will only lead to despair as doing so will make us vulnerable to evil's aggressive assaults.

There is abundant evil in the valley of the shadow of death, but the Shepherd is there with His staff to guide us. None of us knows the way of death until we actually confront it for ourselves. We can sit by the side of a loved one and watch him or her pass through the valley, we can hold the hand and kiss the cheek of one journeying through the valley, but we will never understand what it's like until we go there ourselves. When we get there, we will be on new ground. We will be on the threshold of a new and unique passageway. We will need a guide. We will need someone to direct our steps. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jeremiah 10:23). We will need the support of the Shepherd's staff to make it safely to the other side.

Indeed, as the hymn says, we are going down the valley one by one. Each of us is closer to our first step into that valley than we ever have been. "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." (Romans 13:11). Thanks be unto God that no one has to walk through that valley alone. The Shepherd is there to lead those who are faithful to Him over the rough and rocky terrain of death's path to the heavenly street of gold (Revelation 21:21).

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