

**Psalm 23: 3b-4; “In the Paths of Righteousness”, A Sermon delivered at the
Premier Estates Nursing Home on October 29th, 2017,
by Pastor Paul Rendall.**

In the first part of Psalm 23, we found that as we trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, our Shepherd-King, He provides for every one of our spiritual needs, so that we will not lack any good thing. We will not lack any wholesome truth, or refreshing and nourishing grace, to teach us, or to lead us, or to restore comfort to our soul, as our full intention by grace, is to walk with our Lord and learn the obedience of faith. Starting in verse 3b and running down through the rest of this blessed Psalm, we find out what the Lord our Shepherd does, to help the believer on, so that they will walk in the paths of righteousness, through good times and bad. And we will find that He will then bring them to dwell in His house forever. 1st of all – Let’s think together about Christ’s righteousness and the paths we walk on. 2nd – Let’s think together about Christ’s grace to us in the valleys of life and death. I want you to think with me this afternoon about how great Christ’s care is as the Good Shepherd of His sheep.

1st of all – Let’s think together about Christ’s righteousness and the paths we walk on.

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” The paths of righteousness are listed for us here in the plural, as being more than one. Let me see if I can explain this to you. There are paths of righteousness which we as believers walk upon, which are related to the truth of the gospel and living a life of faith in the risen Christ. And then there are the paths which we walk upon, which are the walk of our obedience to God’s word in relation to Christ’s giving us daily supplies of grace. The walk of faith is my continual everyday relationship with Jesus Christ which is established by my trusting in Him for salvation, and my trusting in Him for grace in the many situations that He leads me into, day by day. Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from sin? Have you been justified by faith in Jesus Christ? Have you been declared righteous by God based upon your believing in the finished work of Jesus Christ; His work of righteousness and sufferings on your behalf? Then you are now on the path of righteousness.

This work of Christ in righteousness is what you must believe in, in order to be saved. You must believe in Jesus work, not your own, in order to come to know the reality of the forgiveness of your sins. When you believe in Christ’s sufferings on your behalf, His having gone to the cross of Calvary, for a sinner like you, and His having borne the guilt of all your sins there, then you are reconciled to God, and you are forgiven by God of all the wicked and sinful things which you have ever done in the past. When you believe in Christ’s righteousness on your behalf, you are believing in His having obeyed God’s holy law perfectly in your place. He obeyed the 10 commandments, perfectly. You believe that the Lord Jesus loved the Lord His God with all of His heart, soul, mind, and strength, and His neighbor as Himself, perfectly. When you believe that He did this, then God the Father imputes Christ’s righteousness to you, at the time of your first believing in Him. He charges Christ’s righteousness to your legal account, and you are seen by God as clothed in the righteousness of Christ. From that time forward in your life, you are seen by God, as being “in Christ”. Your justification is once for all, and it never changes. Once God has declared you righteous, you can never lose your salvation. This is because it is Christ and His works, Christ and His righteousness, Christ and His intercession, and advocacy before the Father, that is considered by the Father, and not how you are in yourself; in your flesh.

Because of Christ, you have died to sin, and you now live to righteousness. You have come to God by this new and living way that He has made for you to know God and to walk with God. By the shedding of His precious blood, you have found remission of sins; the paying of your sin-

debt, and by this new and living way which He has consecrated for you, you are able to enter through the veil of His flesh, into the Holy of Holies, in prayer, because He is now seated there at the right hand of the Father, in heaven, and He ever lives to make intercession for you. Someday you will be able to enter into heaven yourself, not because of anything that you have done, but because of everything that He has done for you, in righteousness and sufferings. His wounds will always plead for your being forgiven when you do sin. 1st John 2: 1 says – “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin.” “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” In other words, when we sin as a Christian, we have One who is at God’s right hand who acts as our defense lawyer. He does not defend us remaining in our sins. He defends us as those who belong to Him. He has purchased us by His blood and righteousness, and He will plead for us based upon what He will do for us by His precious and powerful grace. His righteousness and His wounds are being continually pleaded for us at the throne of grace so that you can have access to Him in prayer. And what you will plead in prayer to Him is that you might be changed and transformed so that you will no longer love your sin, and you are fully intending to work with Him so that you will come to hate that sin and want to live a righteous and holy life in the sight of the Father. When you pray in this holy way, you will be forgiven of all sins that you commit in the present, and any that you may commit, on into the future, for the rest of your life, because of His faithfulness.

When you confess your sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive all of your sins and He cleanses you from all unrighteousness. Romans 5: 1 says – “Having been justified by faith, you now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also you have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and you rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” His doing all of these good things for you is also the basis of your daily walk with God on the path of righteousness. He leads you on the path of righteousness for His name’s sake. That is, for Jesus’ sake, the Father and the Spirit lead you and guide you into all the truth, and help you along in your walking in righteousness before God. Oh, what a blessed reality this is, for the one trusting in the Lord Jesus. Because you believe in Jesus, you receive light and life in His name. And then, as it says in Proverbs 4: 18 – “The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. Every day you are walking with Jesus upon the path of righteousness, and for His name’s sake, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is imparted to you, the believer.

This is something that you should glory in. Listen to what riches are stored up for you and given to you, the believer, as the days of your life go by. Listen to what Christ died to purchase for you, dear believer. In Proverbs 8, verse 17, the pre-incarnate Christ tells us – “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.” “Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness.” “My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver.” “I traverse the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, that I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries.” In Proverbs 12: 28 it says – ‘In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.’ It is Christ who make this way of righteousness life and peace to every true believer. Jeremiah 6: 16 says: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.”

Let me say to you that the main thing that the Christian pursues in living the Christian life is to be a righteous and holy person. But they do not pursue righteousness in a legalistic way. Let me ask you, does the Christian pursue righteousness simply on the basis of his own determination? No, indeed! They pursue keeping the commandments of God by faith in Christ and what He has done for them, and what He is doing for them by His grace. The Lord leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. He leads us into the right thing to do in every situation by reminding me that I am to live for His glory and not my own, and that He will so

lead me and work in me by His Spirit that I see that He is doing this, not for my sake, anything good that is in me, but rather for His name's sake; that I would see that my obedience is a matter of honoring Him.

Now 2nd - Let's think together about Christ's grace to us in the valleys of life and death.

Verse 4 says – “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” Walking through the valley of the shadow of death is not simply the valley that you pass through just before you are going to die, although it is certainly that. It is all the different valleys of humiliation, difficulty, and trial, that you pass through while on the path of righteousness. Those things in which you feel that there is a dark shadow over you. You are trying to do the right thing, but there are many points in your experience where you need the Good Shepherd's care. In this regard, His rod and His staff, they comfort you. What does the Shepherd have the rod and the staff for? It is for the protection of His sheep from all enemies, and to guide them to into everything that He would have them to do. It is to pull them back onto the path where needed, and it is to direct them into the way of righteousness in the most dark and difficult of situations.

Albert Barnes in his commentary says: “The meaning of this in the connection in which it occurs is this: “God will lead and guide me in the path of righteousness, even though that path lies through the darkest and most gloomy vale - through deep and dismal shades - in regions where there is no light, as if death had cast his dark and baleful shadow there. It is still a right path; it is a path of safety; and it will conduct me to bright regions beyond. In that dark and gloomy valley, though I could not guide myself, I will not be alarmed; I will not be afraid of wandering or of being lost; I will not fear any enemies there - for my Shepherd is there to guide me still.” He further goes on to say: “The idea is that of death casting his gloomy shadow over that valley - the valley of the dead. Hence, the word is applicable to any path of gloom or sadness; any scene of trouble or sorrow; any dark and dangerous way. Thus understood, it is applicable not merely to death itself - though it embraces that - but to any or all the dark, the dangerous, and the gloomy paths which we tread in life: to ways of sadness, solitude, and sorrow. All along those paths God will be a safe and certain guide.”

Oh, I think that is so very good. What is comforting to the Christian while going through the valley of the shadow of death? It is the thought that Christ is with Him as His Good Shepherd. Since Christ is with you, you need fear no evil, even though you may be surrounded by much evil. Again, Albert Barnes says – “Dark, cheerless, dismal as it seems, I will dread nothing. The true friend of God has nothing to fear in that dark valley. His great Shepherd will accompany him there, and can lead him safely through, however dark it may appear. The true believer has nothing to fear in the most gloomy scenes of life; he has nothing to fear in the valley of death; he has nothing to fear in the grave; he has nothing to fear in the world beyond.”

There is an incident that I would like to relate to you from The Great Texts of the Bible Commentary, which I was studying. It says this: “It is the love of Christ and trust in Him that alone can give true courage. For notice that there is no attempt made in the Psalm to paint death otherwise than it is, in itself evil, fearful, and appalling. But it is the love of Christ that gives the confidence, the courage that we need. The God who has fed us, the Good Shepherd who has guided us through so many perils, is true and staunch, and will not desert His sheep in the hour of danger. Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. Among Mr. Brown's duties as assistant to Edward Irving in London one was to visit the Sunday schools, once a month each, when one of the exercises was the repetition of metre Psalms. An incident connected with this duty made such a deep impression on him that more than sixty years afterwards, when he was in his ninety-second year, he recorded the circumstances in a journal conducted by the Young Men's Christian Association of Aberdeen. A poor, sickly boy, too unwell

to be out, had repeated the Twenty-third Psalm. Next month it was reported that he was dying, and Mr. Brown went to see him, and found him in a miserable place—a sort of drying loft.”

“The mother met him with tears in her eyes, and told him that her boy had been speaking all night. “What has he been speaking about?” asked Mr. Brown. “Well, sir, you see I am a Roman Catholic, and I don’t know your hymns, but it’s something about death’s dark vale.” “Oh! my woman, I know well what your boy has been speaking about; take me to him.” “On reaching his bed [Dr. Brown explained], I found it was a deal box, and he was lying on straw. ‘My dear boy,’ I said, as he looked up smiling, ‘you are dying.’ ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘Are you afraid to die?’ ‘No, sir.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because I am going to Jesus.’ ‘But how do you know that you are going to Jesus?’ ‘Because I love Him.’ It was a child’s answer [said Dr. Brown], but it was music to me.” [Note: W. G. Blaikie, David Brown, D.D., LL.D., 36.]

In closing I would just say this: Would you have eternal comfort and good hope in the midst of all of your passing through the valley of the shadow of death? Remember your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died so that you might live. He came that you might have life, and that more abundantly. He died so that He could give you His Holy Spirit to live in your heart, so that He might be with you always. It is because He died and rose again that death itself shall only be a walk in the shadow, and it will not hurt you dear Christian. It is designed to cause you to draw nearer to Him, the One who loved you and has given Himself for you, that you might be with Him forever, and behold His glory.