TOPIC: Loneliness, Christian Living, Comfort

“You're Never As Alone As You Feel”
PSALM 23:1-6 (NKJV)

Our scripture text this evening comes to us from one of the most beloved passages in all the Bible, the 23rd Psalm.

Psalm 23:1-6 (NKJV)

1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

3. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.

4. 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.

5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

PRAYER

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INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION

Several years ago someone ran an ad in a Kansas City newspaper. It read: “I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for $5.00.” Although it sounded like the ad was a hoax, the person who placed the ad was very serious.

Did anyone call? They sure did! It wasn’t long before this individual was receiving nearly twenty calls per day. The callers were mostly people who were intensely lonely who just wanted someone to listen to them, even if it meant paying $5.00.

Some of the greatest characters in the Bible went through periods of intense loneliness.

* For ABRAHAM it was the loneliness of widowhood following the death of his beloved Sarah.

* For JOSEPH it was the loneliness of “a pit” and later a prison cell.

* For DAVID it was the loneliness of a wilderness while on the run for his life from King Saul.

* For JEREMIAH it was the loneliness of being put in a dungeon for preaching the truth about Israel’s sin.

* And for JESUS it was the loneliness of a cross.
LONELINESS is being at home with an empty chair, an empty bed, and an empty place at the table to remind you your loved one isn't there any more.

LONELINESS is looking around when you're eighty or ninety years old and realizing most, if not all of your friends have passed away.

LONELINESS is having your dream of a happy marriage shattered by divorce.

LONELINESS is being a soldier thousands of miles from home at Christmastime.

LONELINESS is being an awkward teenager who doesn't seem to fit in anywhere.

LONELINESS is being in car with your mate riding in complete silence, knowing the love and intimacy in your marriage has grown cold.

LONELINESS is being wheeled on a gurney to an operating room while your family stays behind.

LONELINESS is taking care of an aging parent who can't even remember your name.

LONELINESS is being told by the doctor you have a terminal illness and there's nothing they can do for you.

LONELINESS HAS "MANY DIFFERENT FACES."
In his book, “Through The Wilderness of Loneliness” Tim Hansel writes: "Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Loneliness is feeling alone . . . no matter how many people are around you. It is a feeling of being disconnected, unplugged, left out, isolated."

(Through The Wilderness of Loneliness by Tim Hansel, pp. 59-60, David C. Cook Publishers, Elgin, IL, Copyright 1991)

Did you catch that? “Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Loneliness is feeling alone.” How many of you have ever been in a crowded room full of people and still felt all alone? I certainly have!

The Lord's message to all of us in this 23rd Psalm is this: “You Are Never As Alone As You Feel.”

In this 23rd Psalm, David teaches us four things to remember when we go through times of loneliness.

First of all, when you are lonely.....

I. Remember You Have The PROVISIONS of The LORD (vs.1-3)

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I SHALL NOT WANT.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.
1. Here David is remind us of the beautiful relationship we have with the LORD. The LORD is "our Shepherd" and we are His sheep.

2. Notice what David says in verse 1 about the Lord's provisions. "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not WANT."

   The NLT (New Living Translation) words it this way: "The LORD is my shepherd, I have all that I need."

   The NIV (New International Version) says, "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing."

3. Sheep are NOT hunters, they are the hunted. Sheep are not predatory animals, they are the prey. Sheep are totally DEPENDENT creatures. They depend upon their shepherd to PROVIDE all their NEEDS.

4. Likewise, you and I are dependent upon the LORD to provide all our needs. When we are lonely there are many things we may "want."

   * We want GOD to take away the misery of our loneliness
   * Or we may want GOD to bring someone into our life to fill that lonely, empty void in our lives.
   * Or we may want GOD to give our loved one back to us.
   * Or we may want GOD to send our "wayward mate" back home so we can patch up our broken marriage.
ILLUSTRATION Reminds me of the story about the woman in her late thirties who saw her chances of ever getting married slipping away.

Well one day she was talking to her mother about her loneliness and her fear she might never find a husband. Feeling sympathy for her daughter, the mother gave her a little “motherly advice.” She said, “Hang a pair of men’s pants on your bed post and every night before you go to bed pray, ‘Dear LORD, there’s a pair of men’s pants hanging on my bed post, please put a man in them.’

Several nights later the mother stepped into her son’s bedroom to tell him goodnight. Not realizing that he had overheard the advice she had given to his older sister, the mother was shocked when she found a lady’s bikini hanging on her son’s bed post, and she heard him praying, ‘Dear LORD, there’s a bikini hanging on my bed post, please put a beautiful woman in it.”

5. In times of loneliness GOD doesn’t promise to provide us with everything we want, but He does promise to provide us with everything we need.

v.2a says, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”

That means the LORD promises to provide all our PHYSICAL needs when we are lonely.
v. 2b says, “He leads me beside the still waters.”

“Still waters” is symbolic of peace and rest. That means the LORD promises to provide all our **EMOTIONAL** needs when we are lonely.

v. 3 says, “He restores my soul; He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

That means the LORD promises to provide all our **SPIRITUAL** needs.

Remember: “You're never as alone as you feel!”

Secondly, when you are lonely......

II. **Remember You Have The PRESENCE of The LORD** (v.4a)

v. 4a Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; **FOR YOU ARE WITH ME.**

1. **The valley of the shadow of death** sounds like an awful place doesn’t it. Sounds like a good title for a **mystery novel** or even a **scary movie**.
2. What is David talking about when he says, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” There are many difficult circumstances we go through in life where we don’t actually die, but we feel as though the shadow of death itself is looming over us.

We go through circumstances that are so difficult, so dark, so painful, we don’t know how we will survive. Perhaps its an automobile accident that leaves you with severe injuries. Or going through months of unemployment with little or no income. Or maybe its getting buried under a mountain of medical expenses after a major surgery.

3. Circumstances like these and many others can cause us to feel an intense loneliness and sense of hopelessness and despair.

4. But I want to draw your attention to one word in that 4th verse and that is the word “through.” “Yea, though I walk THROUGH the valley of the shadow of death.” That word “through” is a word of hope! The LORD is reminding us that no matter how lonely we feel....no matter how difficult or hopeless our circumstance may seem at the present moment, we will get “through” the valley. How, you ask? Because no matter how alone we feel in the valley, we are not alone! THE LORD IS WITH US!
5. There may be **AN EMPTY PLACE** beside you in bed at night, **BUT YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

There may be **AN EMPTY CHAIR** beside you at the table when you eat your meals, **BUT YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

There may be **A PAINFUL SILENCE** inside your house, **BUT YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

There may be **AN EMPTY SPACE** beside you in the Church pew, **BUT YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

There may be **AN INTENSE LONELINESS** as you lie there in that hospital bed, **BUT YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

6. **The LORD is present with us every moment of every day!**
   **REMEMBER:**  **YOU ARE NEVER AS ALONE AS YOU FEEL!**

Thirdly, when you are feeling lonely.....
III. Remember You Have The **PROTECTION** of The **LORD** (vs.4b,5)

v.4b Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

v.5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

1. Shepherds didn't carry a whole lot with them when they watched over their sheep, but two things a good shepherd would never be without was **“a rod and a staff.”**

**“THE ROD AND STAFF”**

Each shepherd boy, from the time he first starts tending his father's sheep, takes special pride in the selection of a rod and staff exactly suited to his own size and strength. He goes into the woods and selects a young sapling. Then he carves it and whittles it down with great care. After he's finished, the shepherd boy spends hours and hours practicing how to throw the rod with great speed and accuracy. **The rod is his weapon of protection for both himself and his sheep against would-be predators such as wolves and mountain lions.**

While the **rod** was an instrument of protection, **“the staff”** was an instrument of correction. The shepherd would use the crooked end of his staff to gently lift stray sheep out of crevaces or to free them from thicket. Other times he might use the **staff** to gently guide a sheep away from poisonous plants. *(A SHEPHERD LOOKS AT THE 23RD PSALM* by Philip Keller, Zondervan, Copyright 2007)*
2. There is a certain danger that goes along with being alone. People who live alone are often targets of robbers, muggers, and scammers.

3. And in a spiritual sense, times of loneliness often makes us very vulnerable to attacks from Satan. Satan often uses our times of loneliness to lure us into sinful activities to ease our pain or to cause us to stray away from our Good Shepherd.

4. The “rod and staff” symbolize the word of GOD which provides us with both, protection and correction.

   One of the best things we can do during times of intense loneliness in our lives is to immerse ourselves in the word of God. Through the guidance of His Holy Spirit, God's word will protect us from the evil one, and keep us on the correct path.

In times of loneliness always remember…….

   You Have The PROVISIONS of The LORD.
   You Have The PRESENCE of The LORD.
   You Have The PROTECTION of The LORD.
And fourthly, always remember......

IV. You Have The PROMISES of The LORD (v. 6)

v. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

1. It is believed that David wrote this beautiful 23rd Psalm while a fugitive in the wilderness when King Saul was out to kill him. In fact, David was in the wilderness for ten long years.

2. While in the wilderness he didn’t have the normal comforts one relies upon for security. He slept in caves or on the hard ground at night. He had to catch or kill his food each day.

3. But though he lacked the physical comforts during those lonely years, David found great comfort in the PROMISES OF GOD. David found great comfort in knowing that God’s goodness and God’s mercy would be upon him all the days of his life, and that when this life is over, he would go to dwell with the Lord in heaven forever and ever.
4. Sometimes in periods of intense loneliness we are tempted to believe that GOD'S goodness and GOD'S mercy are not upon us. We feel abandoned and forsaken. We feel as though God has turned His back on us or that He doesn't care about us. **NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH!**

5. Its in our times of loneliness we must have **FAITH and TRUST in God's promises more than ever!** We must have faith and trust that if GOD has promised “to never leave us or forsake us” He will keep His promise! We must have faith and trust that if GOD promises “He will work all things together for our good” that He will keep His promise!

6. GOD doesn't promise us that we will never go through times of loneliness and sorrow and grief. He never promises us that life here on earth will be easy or void of any troubles or problems. **But He has promised that His goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life, and when this life is over He will make all things right when we come to live in His house forever!**
CONCLUSION

I want to conclude my message tonight a little differently. About thirty years ago, I was going through one of the most difficult times of my life.

My marriage had fallen apart. I was out of the ministry and couldn’t find employment and for nearly a year I had no income. I was back home living with my parents at that time. Those were some very dark days, days of intense loneliness and depression unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

One night I sat down with my guitar in hand and started writing a song that I prayed GOD would use to comfort my own heart and minister to other lonely people as well. I would like to share it with you all as we close. Its called, “Lonely In A Crowd.”

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