

God's Protection

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[0 : 00] The first from the Old Testament in Ezekiel, and the second, the Gospel of John, chapter 10. So Ezekiel, chapter 3, verse 11 to 16.

Ezekiel, chapter 3, verse 11 through to 16. And go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, whether they hear or refuse to hear.

Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake. Blessed be the glory of the Lord from its place. It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, and the sound of a great earthquake.

The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit. The hand of the Lord being strong upon me. And I came to the exiles at Tel Abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar Canal.

And I sat where they were dwelling, and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days. And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me.

[1 : 17] And then over into the Gospel of John, chapter 10. John 10, verse 27 to 30.

John 10, verse 27 through to 30. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I and the Father are one. Amen. Thank you. Now before God's protection, have you ever had one of those days when everything goes right, and there's no one around to see it happen?

I think we all have. And yet we turn to a verse of Scripture like the one Paul wrote to the church at Rome. And he said in 8, 28, And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him.

[2 : 50] But sometimes that doesn't seem to be the case. Charles Swindle, a great author that I love reading, said this, Believe it or not, you may live to see the day when your journey into darkness is amongst your most cherished memories.

For example, the woman who has her children all screaming at once. One is ill.

Another in a tantrum at not getting his own way. And a third shouting at his mother for not listening to him.

Or the husband who's a secure job. And one day he goes into work. The boss calls him into his office to hear the words, Sorry, I have to make you redundant.

Or maybe even the person who's never had a day's illness in their life and suddenly gets bad news and wonders how they are going to face the future.

[4 : 24] Any life they had, any hope they had, had been decimated. And all of those situations can be physically draining and can cause so many different reactions to them.

like the woman who empties a bottle of pills and thinks long and hard before swallowing them.

But she does. The husband goes off in his car connecting a pipe to the exhaust and letting the outcome take its own toll.

Or the news about the illness drives the individual to pieces. They don't want to face the future or accept any help.

Now you transfer those situations into a Christian or a church setting. And you know it, I'm sure.

[5 : 47] Everything's going well. The church can see great potential. There's openness within each other and the fellowship.

And the signs are that things are beginning to thrive. And suddenly, problems arise and somewhere and somehow things can't be handled.

There's friction, unrest, disquiet, different consequences. But the results are similar.

And many people in that situation would lose faith and ask the question, why? And it's at those times that the enemy strikes and tells you you've been let down by God or suggests in your less spiritual moments that you're just not good enough. and that's why these things have happened. And these are genuine situations that cause us to cry as Jacob did in a different era.

[7 : 28] all these things are against me. When we begin to think that there must be some truth in this which affects our devotional life.

But maybe it's just the fact that we've taken our eyes off the Lord. We've looked to the problems. We've made them the most important thing in our life rather than looking to the one who has a solution to all our problems.

And we become spiritually drained. Living like a lifeless Christian. Or we become stressed and want to lash out at the nearest person.

No one no one can be exempt from such situations. However believe it or not you may live to see the day when your journey into darkness may be amongst your most cherished possessions. Some time ago I had a similar experience found myself asking the question why Lord? Why is this happening to me?

[9 : 21] And God deals with us in different ways when that happens. When we question and when we ask him for a solution. For me it was to take me off by his spirit to the Church of Scotland bookshop when it was in George Street.

And there I found a book in the bottom left hand corner of one of the bookshelves. God's and sometimes God's gifts and God's answers to our situations are low down.

And we need to learn humility. it's amazing how God uses those situations and those places you never thought of looking before to find the answer.

And then I was led across the road further across the road to Princess Street Mall or Princess Mall in Webley Station.

The cafe used to be there the fountain it's not I'm told it's no longer there was in full flow and God taught me afresh and I knew about the still waters I just sat there and I gazed and I saw how God could be the still waters for me.

[11 : 22] And later that day my Bible reading was about stress and the writer quotes this stress stress is that confusion created when one's mind overrides the body's desire to choke the living daylights out of some jerk who desperately needs it.

God sometimes has a sense of humor and he teaches many things in life if we are prepared to listen and follow.

John reminds us in his gospel chapter 10 verse 27 my sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me.

the story is told about a man who was going to holiday in Israel and he was told that when you go to that country you'll find the shepherd always leading his sheep.

Think of his amazement when he got there and on one occasion he saw the shepherd what he thought was a shepherd behind the sheep rather than in front of them and so he made an inquiry what's going on?

[13 : 12] The man said to him I'm not the shepherd I'm the butcher and we have to be aware who we are following my sheep know my voice I know them and they follow me and that whole incident caused me to turn to Psalm 23 the setting of the psalm is unsure but some believe it it was born out of David's conflict with Absalom you find in 2 Samuel chapter 11 21 verse 15 the Lord took David tired broken and healed him and that's what God desires to do with our lives when we're at a low ebb when we're tired and we might be spiritually broken he wants to take us in those situations and he wants to heal us but are you ready to let him heal you of this

Psalm John McNeill known as the Scottish Spurgeon said I sometimes feel I wrote it myself and I'm sure that there are times when you've read the Psalms that you can identify with them and you might even say how did God know this about me but God knows everything about you and me he knows us better than we know ourselves if we're honest and he can speak to us through his word in such a way that helps us to feel comforted challenged corrected and filled with his presence the Lord is my shepherd the Jehovah shepherd the I am shepherd

I am with you that I am phrase has become personal to the psalmists the Lord is his shepherd the Lord is our shepherd the Lord is the I am not the I was or the I will be but the I am I shall not want

David is reminded of God's provision at Mahaniam 2 Samuel 17 and 28 they also brought wheat and barley flour and roasted grain beans and lentils honey and curds sheep and cheese from cow's milk for David and his people to eat and that shepherd leads us into green pastures and quiet waters and for sheep this means the best conditions but sometimes you might say it doesn't seem like it for me when those green pastures and quiet waters are anything but believe it or not you may live to see the day when your journey into darkness is amongst your most cherished memories and Isaiah reminds us in 1431 they that wait upon the Lord shall not might but shall renew their strength it's a waiting that sometimes can be difficult and long but you have to wait to those who wait patiently and quietly trusting

God it's green pastures and quiet waters forever whatever happens because in those situations as we wait God is there those still waters you know that the sheep are afraid of fast flowing water because if they fall into the water the weight of the water will pull them down and they'll drown and the shepherd make sure that they are satisfied and so does God with us he leads me and we need to allow him as we follow him and not take our eyes off

Christ and his word trust God in the fast flowing waters of your life that as he comes to you and brings that quietness and stills those waters those situations you will know him as an amazing God and amazing provider he restores my soul he brings healing Jehovah Rapha I am the Lord that healeth you or as Moffat translates it he revives life in me the shepherd is patient is tender is skillful and is faithful and we too need to let go and let God and sometimes that can be very difficult to let go and let God learn because we live in a situation when we are wanting instant results something happens and we want the answer like that and God says to us sometimes you've got to wait and listen learn from this situation trust in me let your hope be in me let me be your comfort and your strength and the one who will show you the way through all these things that are happening to you because

[21 : 49] I want to heal you and bless you the path of righteousness the impression that's given here in these verses is something definite and distinct McNeill comments that the Dutch have a word for path spoor s-p-o-o-r which is a sheep's track and when you look at them they begin nowhere go nowhere and get nowhere and McNeill points out that as God leads these tracks are different from day to day yet God is there in them that shepherd guides not so much to righteousness well defined but to the place where we can find it with his wisdom the clear print of his righteous way for his name's sake that is for his glory the psalmist then speaks about death the dark gloom you see as

David thinks about these things and writes this psalm he's thinking about the shepherd leading them through the thicket or the glen and that shepherd requires a clear eye and courage to ward off animals the shadow of death the shadow of a sword won't cut you the shadow of a dog won't bite you and with the shadow of death we have no need to fear last week I had to conduct a funeral service the Sunday before that's last Sunday after church

I was preaching in we went out to see Joe and Joe said to us at the end of our conversation as Lynn said to him about God would be with him he said but God's taken away my best friend and he was hurting he was distressed and we had to point out to him that may very well be the case but God is still with you and God will still bring to your memory all the memories that you had of Carol his hope had to be in the Lord even in the face of death because the

Lord Jesus Christ is with me and is with you in all I do and all I say and all I think and I need to learn to follow him implicitly wholly and completely not to follow a counterfeit or an imposter not to follow someone whom I think will lead me but to know to know the person who promises he will lead me through all those situations in life the staff that the psalmist speaks about was used by the shepherd when the sheep went astray or when he was guarding them into his fold or the pen or used to keep the sheep down as he examined him or examined the sheep for any injuries and to be under God's staff can be a very humbling experience that rod the rod and staff was a short club two inches long with a bitumen head and was used for protection tasty c for aamp with auation car Indeed, the shepherd knew all the poisonous grasses around about, the venomous snakes, and so he would root out the grasses in order that the snake would be protected.

[28 : 08] Therefore, the sheep were refreshed in the presence of defeated enemies. And that goes for us too, that God protects us from our enemies if we are willing to look and listen and obey and follow.

But sometimes we go on our own way. And you know what happens when the sheep goes in its own way? Its head goes down, doesn't look where it's going. Sometimes that can happen to us. Our head goes down and we don't see where we're going. But to follow Jesus, we have that assurance and confidence that he will protect us from all that comes to us.

Our lives need not be defeated. Our lives surely must have that confidence in them, in the God who cares, the God who loves.

You know that old chorus used to sing in Sunday school?

[29 : 46] Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow. As I thought about that, it suddenly struck me it's not an option either to read my Bible or to pray.

The chorus says, read your Bible and pray every day. And I need to learn to read my Bible. And from reading my Bible, I know how to pray. As I watch the world around me and see the situations in it, I know how to pray.

Beth Moore, a great Bible teacher, has written a number of books. Living Free is one of them. learning to pray God's Word. And she says this. She talks about the Apostle Paul speaking about strongholds.

[31 : 06] And in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 10, verses 3 onwards, the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

on the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. and God wants to demolish the strongholds that might be in our lives.

A stronghold is anything we hold onto that ends up holding us. Human effort is useless in demolishing strongholds.

Satanic strongholds Satanic strongholds require divine demolishing. To blow up every stronghold the devil seeks to build in our lives requires two sticks of dynamite, the Word and prayer.

And then there is revival. As we follow, as we listen, as we learn, as we keep in his control and use his Word and the great aspect of prayer as sticks of dynamite, God can blow up the strongholds that hold onto our lives.

[32 : 53] Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Surely, the psalmist says, surely goodness and mercy, that pleasant, enjoyable, agreeable time when we know the kindness and mercy of God.

David's life was indeed a good illustration of God's mercy. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. I go to prepare a place for you, said Jesus.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will return. And where I go, you may be also. Some New Testament scholars translate this into the word caravan serai.

That is a hotel in the middle of a desert where travelers find rest, refreshment, and good company. and that is where you are heading. Those who know the Lord Jesus, you're heading to that place of refreshment, that place of rest, and that place of good company.

[34 : 21] Are you looking forward to it? believe it or not, you may live to see the day when your journey into darkness is among your most cherished memories.

So don't despair at what you might be going through or have gone through. God is there to lead you. Take that psalm, Psalm 23, and see God's provision for you in every step of your life.

And know his rest, his refreshment, and his good company forever. Let's pray. Lord God, thank you that you want to lead us.

Your desire is to lead us. Forgive us for those times when we have taken our eyes off you and failed to follow you as we should.

And we know, we know so often we've got ourselves into trouble. Help us to be more in tune with you and to listen to you, to read your word, and to pray that we may have those two sticks of dynamite to blow up the strong holes that Satan has on us.

[36 : 05] Lead us in the paths of righteousness. In Jesus' name. Amen.