

Standing before the Valley

King David wrote in Psalm 23v4...

"Even when I must walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff reassure me." NET version

As much as we would like to think that we will always be enjoying the lush, green pastures of life and be spared the dark valleys, for the vast majority of us there will inevitably come times of stress, anguish, foreboding, fear, sadness, grief and pain – if not for our own condition it will be for someone we love; a child, a parent, a dear friend; struck down by dis-ease, accident or the actions of others. Given enough time, each of us will stand before the dark valleys that life presents and realise that we have no choice in the matter – the valley must be entered.

Leading through the dark times

King David looked to the Great Shepherd to lead him through the dark times, but I suggest this is not the first thought of most in similar situations. They may greet their trials with despair and anger; denial and rejection; anxiety and a feeling of hopelessness. They will ask "why me?".

Perhaps, "I don't deserve this".

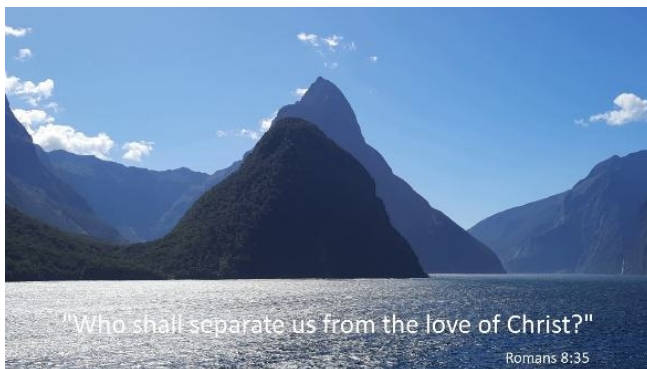
Some people will turn to God in moments like this to get them through that dark valley, but what they really want is for the valley to go away, for a short cut around the valley, for an easy way out. For some, that miracle might well happen, but for most the road will have to be taken and the trials endured. God has not promised to remove trial, rather He has promised to help us through the darkness.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2Corinthians 4v6...

"For God, who said "Let light shine out of darkness," is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ."

Wonderful and true as this is, Paul also realizes that this revelation comes to us in our mortality. He goes on to say in verse 7...

*"But we have this treasure in **clay jars**, so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us."*



God's treasure

We are clay jars, made from earth with no power to control or to save ourselves from the evils and afflictions that come to all mortals. Yet God is pleased to offer us, in our weakness, a treasure, elsewhere styled "a pearl of great price", namely, knowledge of Him and His son the Lord Jesus Christ. With that knowledge, Paul found the strength he needed, and he adds...

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed..."

In Romans 8v35 we are assured...

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

The answer to that rhetorical question comes in verses 37-39 with a firm...

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When Claudia Minden Weisz wrote the following poem in 1980 she was beginning a journey through a stressful, sad and scary valley of her own. She had just learned that her daughter was suffering from Rett Syndrome, a rare genetic neuro-logical and developmental disorder that affects the way the brain develops. The condition causes a progressive loss of motor skills and language.

"I asked God to take away my habit. God said, 'No. It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.'

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole. God said, 'No. His mind is whole, his body is only temporary.'

I asked God to grant me patience. God said, 'No. Patience is a byproduct of tribulations; It isn't granted, it is learned.'

I asked God to give me happiness. God said, 'No. I give you blessings; Happiness is up to you.' I asked God to spare me pain. God said, 'No. Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares, and brings you closer to me.'

I asked God to make my character grow. God said, 'No. You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.'

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life. God said, 'No. I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things.'

I asked God to help me LOVE others, as much as He loves me. God said, 'Ahhhh, finally you have the idea.' "

AMEN.

Peter Collins
