The Pilgrim's Quest

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and ***confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims*** *on the earth. For they that say such things* ***declare plainly that they seek a country.***" (Heb. 11:13,14)

Pilgrim's Quest Bible Church
Pastor Garry E. Huff

"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
vs. 4

There is a great benefit when the sheep are constantly following the Shepherd, in that, they become thoroughly acquainted with Him. They become thoroughly acquainted with His voice. They are acquainted with His presence. They fully know His loving care and tender mercies. Through all the changes of the seasons, the Shepherd has been with them and they have been with the Shepherd. Whether rain, sleet, hail, snow, or warm sunny days, the Shepherd endures the same with the sheep. When the sheep suffer from the heat, so does the Shepherd. When the cold is bearing down with freezing temperatures, the Shepherd remains with the sheep. Thus, the sheep come to fully know the Shepherd well. The sheep come to know His love for His sheep. They see Him being ever present as He too bears what His sheep are bearing.

This constant nearness of the Shepherd's presence brings about a ***personal knowledge*** of the Shepherd rather than a knowledge ***about*** the Shepherd. ***He*** has been in every imaginable circumstance leading, directing, guiding, blessing, and providing. ***He*** has been in every respect unfailing.

The Psalmist makes a transition from the picturesque meadows and beautiful pools of water to a dark lonely valley. This valley is morbidly called "the valley of the shadow of death." How fore-

boding and ominous is this dark valley! The Psalmist states, "Yea, though ***I*** walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." There is something of a singular solitude of loneliness almost to the point of being abandoned and forsaken. The sheep is seemingly walking alone through a dark valley of death's shadow. He no longer sees his Shepherd. He can not discern His voice. It is here that great doubts, trouble, fears, alarms come to the mind and heart. We may wonder if we have wandered off the path that was so clear. We may miss the "many blessings" that we have become so accustomed to. The tempter roars like a lion to bring doubt of the loving care of the Shepherd. "If the Shepherd truly cared and loved His sheep so much, why are His sheep alone in this dark valley of the shadow of death? Why has He allowed me to come to such a place? Has the Shepherd suddenly left me in the lurch to perish in this valley?"

Thus, the valley of death's shadow can be a most disturbing and troubling place if we are not mindful of the Shepherd's constant presence or the comfort of His rod and staff. And yet, this valley is the place for the abandonment of self and the exaltation of the all sufficient Shepherd. It is the place for the dismantling and discarding of all that has been relied upon, depended upon, and trusted in, ***apart*** from the Shepherd. It is the forsaking self-works, self-abilities, self-achievements and self-thoughts in order to depend upon God alone. It is the total complete full surrender to the Shepherd and the yieldedness to willingly follow wherever He leads. The Shepherd has delivered the sheep from the wild mountains of sin. But now another mountain looms where deliverance is needed. It is a ***high*** mountain - the ***mountain of self***. So, the Shepherd leads the sheep ***down*** to the valley of the shadow of death in order to reveal a heart and soul stripped of self with a determined resolve that declares - ***"Not I, but the Shepherd alone."***

It is here in this dark, silent valley, there comes a willingness to allow blindness to come to the eyes of self, deafness to the ears of self, insensitivity to the feelings of self, denial to the thoughts of self. It is to become a "living sacrifice" - consumed in death in order that the Shepherd becomes the eyes, the ears, the passion, and the thoughts. In other words, to be totally dependant upon the presence of the Shepherd in all things.

Some years ago I posed a question to myself. If I knew that I would lose either my eyesight or hearing and God gave me the choice

to select between the two, which one would I choose? Which one would I be willing to give up and live without? I immediately selected hearing for I knew that to lose my sight would be quite humiliating and require me to be utterly dependant upon others. I could not drive. I would have difficulty in eating especially in public. Many of the daily things I do would have to be given up. I saw that I could no longer be independent as I have been and the "self" of me did not like that idea. On the other hand, if I lost my hearing I would lose some precious things such as hearing the voice of my wife, the sounds of nature, listening to Christian hymns, the public prayers of the saints, and especially the hearing the preaching of God's word. I realized my choice would be made between the concentric view of "self" or the continual spiritual need of my "soul".

This valley calls upon us to lose the sight of self in its darkness. It also calls upon us to lose hearing of self in its silence. It requires a reliance upon the unseen Shepherd alone and trust the Shepherd's rod and staff that reaches ***down*** from the Shepherd's hand to surround us right where our feet are touching the ground. We may not see the Shepherd, neither hear His voice for the moment. Yet, we hear the tap, tap, tapping of the rod and staff upon the very same ***valley ground*** we are walking upon! We are assured that the Shepherd is more than ever near. He has not left us alone! The rod and staff proves He is with me in the ***same*** valley of death's shadow! ***Most of all, all that He is and has given me is at my disposal in my lowly valley!***

The great and good Shepherd in love brings His sheep to this valley so that a great work may be accomplished in His sheep. It is the place of a full, complete surrender in full love to the Shepherd in a trust that is unyielding. It is a trust to say in all things, in all events and in all circumstances of life, "though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." It is a trust in the fiery furnace of trial and temptation when the heat is the hottest and the flame is the severest to raise up hands to heaven saying "the Lord is my Shepherd. He has not forsaken me. He is ever with me. I will not fear. Lord take it all in this furnace! I give up my sight, my hearing, my reputation, all that I am, so that you may be the light in my eyes, and the voice in my ears, the passion of my heart, and the thoughts of my mind!"

Thus, the valley of the shadow of death can be a precious place where the heart ***fully melts*** into the heart of the Shepherd in ***oneness***!

When waves of trouble round me swell,
My soul is not dismayed;
I hear a voice I know full well, -
" 'T is I; be not afraid."

When black the threatening skies appear,
And storms my path invade,
Those accents tranquilize each fear, -
" 'T is I; be not afraid."

There is a gulf that must be crossed;
Savior, be near to aid!
Whisper, when my frail bark is tossed, -
" 'T is I; be not afraid."

There is a dark and fearful vale,
Death hides within its shade;
Oh, say, when flesh and heart shall fail, -
" 'T is I; be not afraid."

Anon..

Verses for the thought of heart:

"Behold, I go forward, but he *is* not *there;* and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold *him:* he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see *him:* But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:8-10)

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1)

"His left hand *is* under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me ... My beloved *is* mine, and I *am* his" (Song of Sol. 2:6, 16)