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

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:"

Psalm 23
vs. 5a

The all wise and good Shepherd leads His sheep ***into*** the valley of the shadow of death. He leads His sheep ***through*** the valley of the shadow of death. And, He leads His sheep ***out*** of the valley of the shadow of death. Through every part of the journey, the Shepherd has been dedicated to the care and protection of His sheep. In every instance He has been ***thoughtful*** and ***mindful*** of each one that is in His care.

We may think of the Shepherd's ***thoughtfulness*** by His constant thinking of His sheep. Namely, He is thinking of them in their every day moment by moment needs. This was evident from the beginning of the journey in the leading of His sheep to the green pastures and still waters. It is that constant provision of daily bread and fountain of living water. We see this so clearly concerning the children of Israel in the wilderness with the daily provision of manna from heaven and the flowing water from the rock at Horeb.

But complimenting and companion to the Shepherd's ***thoughtfulness*** is the Shepherd's ***mindfulness***. He is ever mindful of the final destination and all that is needed to arrive safely and securely at the concluding end. For the children of Israel in the wilderness, the Lord was mindful of Israel's arrival in Canaan. Therefore, the Lord gave the commandments, statutes, and judgments in preparation for their occupation of the good and pleasant land.

As the all wise and good Shepherd is daily thoughtful of His sheep's needs, He is also mindful of the needed preparation of the sheep for His prepared home. He knows what each sheep needs and accordingly forms the surrounding circumstances ***mindful*** of that final arrival at His home. Yes, some through great waters, some through the flood; some through the fire, but ***all through the blood***.

The Shepherd leads His sheep into the valley of the shadow of death as part of that work that will mold His sheep like unto the Shepherd himself - *to be fitted for a fitted place - prepared for a prepared place.* Much must be done all along the way to remove or strip away all that is unlike the Shepherd. A molding, shaping, conforming is needed in order that there be a oneness - "bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh." There is the "putting on" of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our thoughts become more like His thoughts. Our ways more like His ways. Whatever pleases Him pleases His sheep also. So, there is to be a losing of a life in order to gain a greater life. There is a decrease so that He may increase. There is a great reduction so in Him there is a great expansion. And yes, pain and suffering are part of the Shepherd's plan.

One may ask why does a wise and good Shepherd lead His sheep though the valley of the shadow of death? Why do godly men like Job suffer or even why do the righteous suffer? One reason is that the good Shepherd is ***mindful*** of what we need to be completely ready when we dwell with Him in His house forever. As the purging principle of fire is needed if the gold is going to be pure gold, so is the purging principle needed for those who walk on streets of gold!

The good Shepherd knows so well of the joys and delights that await His sheep, so the sheep pass through the low lands of sorrow, sadness, sickness, and the shadow of death now to be totally, completely, fully ready for the sheep's final resting place.

When the sheep emerge from the valley, the Shepherd brings His sheep to a greater, larger place of fruitfulness and feeding pasture. Yes, thank God the good Shepherd leads His sheep out of the valleys to feed upon a new higher tableland. As one writer states, "In a providential way granting a sufficiency, and even an affluence of temporal good things; the providence of God lays and spreads a table for his people in the wilderness, and sets them down at it, and bids them welcome to it ... and all this **in the presence of my enemies.**" As God furnishes a table

for His people in the wilderness with manna, so the Shepherd leads His sheep to a tableland to partake of greater nourishment unseen and unknown before.

When the children of Israel entered Canaan seven foods for nourishment was theirs. It was a land of wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey. How different from the food of Egypt or that which God provided in the Wilderness! The Shepherd leads His sheep into a veritable feasting banquet on their journey to the Shepherd's home! No doubt a foretaste of what is ahead!

This feast is in the presence of our enemies. It is a feast in spite of our enemies. It is a feast that they can not prevent! But these enemies are more cunningly and deceptively cloaked. It is here that we have the "wolves in sheep's clothing." The more the sheep become like the Shepherd the more the enemy will cloak himself in the likeness of sheep and also the Shepherd in order to deceive the sheep all the more.

A preacher of years past (A.D. 1924) warned the Christian of the coming of antichrist. He said, "No antichrist can persuade and lead us unless he is of the same belief as us. It makes no difference how hard we try to keep the spirit of antichrist out it will come in. ... It must come to us professing everything we profess. It must come too with great power to deceive us. He is among us now I fear." This preacher was speaking of the best churches of his day that held high the standard of biblical holiness and purity of heart. But, what can be said today concerning Christians 100 years later? The ingredient that the spirit of antichrist adds to Christian life is worldliness and the attraction of human ways, appearances, and forces. ***We must not be deceived by these enemies to turn us aside from following the Shepherd!***

The Shepherd has provided a banqueting feast in the presence of such enemies. We see the evidence of His daily presence through His ***thoughtfulness*** as well as His ***mindfulness*** of our future. Most of all we hear the Shepherd's voice of love. He draws us ever nearer and nearer to the power of the Cross that keeps us lifted up above the curse of this world! He will keep His own in "perfect peace whose mind is stayed" upon Him!

I Hear the Words of Love

I hear the words of love, I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice, And I have peace with God.

'Tis everlasting peace! Sure as Jehovah's name,
'Tis stable as His steadfast throne, Forevermore the same.

I change, He changes not; The Christ can never die:
His love, not mine, the resting place, His truth not mine, the tie.

The cross still stands unchanged, Tho' heav'n is now His home;
The mighty stone is rolled away, But yonder is His tomb!

And yonder is my peace, The grave of all my woes!
I know the Son of God has come, I know He died and rose.

I know He liveth now At God's right hand above;
I know the throne on which He sits, I know His truth and love!

Horatio Bonar

Verses for the thought of heart:

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out,* that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." (I Jn. 2:18,19)

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (Mat 7:15)

"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Mat 24:24)

"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.... Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." (Jude 21-25)