



REFLECTIONS

January 10, 2016

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psalm 23:1 KJV

Our Shepherd

Those many days alone in the pasture watching over the sheep shaped his life. No one was with him, only God. He had no one to talk to, only God. There was no one to protect him during those long days, only God.

Time alone offered plenty of time for David to sharpen his slingshot skills. Hour after hour he practiced slinging rocks at make-shift bullseyes. He had time to discover that accuracy was more crucial than power; and that the small smooth rocks were easier to control when accuracy was the premium. So when lions appeared, their catlike moves were no match for young David's skill with a sling and a stone. Or when powerful bears reared to crush their prey, his precision brought them down. And when faced with the haughty challenge of a well-armed giant of a man, David stood fearlessly before him. The Lord was his shepherd. He feared no evil.

Those lonely days in the pasture prepared young David for the battles to be fought in the years ahead. But David found time for the softer side of life too. A harp became his companion. Perhaps someone back home taught him to play, but time alone in the field allowed ample opportunity to practice. Besides the music calmed the flock when they became restless.

And with no one else to talk to, David wrote his prayers to God. Poetic words became second nature as he pursued God's own heart. They were beautiful, heartfelt, and enduring—Psalm 23 perhaps the most familiar. But even those precious moments with God did not reveal the mysteries of life awaiting him. They prepared him for them.

God uses special times to be alone with those who love him. Just as those times alone with David, God found Moses alone in a shepherds' field and called him into service there. In the quiet of night, God wrestled Jacob to gain his attention; and in the solitude of the desert, he prepared Paul to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

David became a great warrior and king. He faced the wrath of angry kings, rejection of an angry wife, and suffered the pain of losing two of his children. But those private times with God built a foundation that would sustain him throughout his life. In the face of it all, David knew where to turn. The Lord was his shepherd.

The mysteries awaiting you and me make our travels through this world an exciting adventure. God uses those quiet times alone with us to shape our lives for the journey just as he shaped David's. The Lord is our Shepherd.

And the Shepherd prepares us for the journey.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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REFLECTIONS

January 3, 2016

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

1 Peter 2:11-12

Cause for Celebration

The parties ended sometime after the New Year made its entry into this world and the old year completed its journey into history books. It's funny that only one year ago we were celebrating the beginning of it. Or were we?

What are New Year celebrations all about any way? Are they celebrations of a conclusion of unpleasant times? Or are they celebrations of hope found in a fresh start? Or did we even bother to think about the cause for celebration in the first place; and just mindlessly go in pursuit of a state of mind away from the difficult realities of life? How easily it is to be sucked into the ways of the world we live in. As the old adage goes, "When you sleep with dogs, you get fleas."

The Apostle John warns, "*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*" (1 John 2:15-17)

So as we journey through this world let us not forget we are traveling through a foreign land alongside the citizens of it; but as much as we might like to be, we are instructed not to become a part of it. Yet how easily it is to adapt to the ways of the world and to conform our lives to its behaviors.

We seem drawn to the sinful desires that war against our souls. We don't really want to be different. The desire for acceptance seems to be a part of our being. *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:15-16) Or as the author of Ecclesiastes wrote: *here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

So, throughout the New Year just beginning, *let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16)

For in so doing will give cause for celebration.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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