

a sermon from PSALM 23:1-6:

FOR U.S. SOLDIERS ON THE EVE OF BATTLE!

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I. AN OPENING PRAYER

“Almighty GOD, unto Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your HOLY SPIRIT, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your Holy Name, through [JESUS] CHRIST, our Lord.”¹ AMEN.

II. PROPOSITION:

Soldiers! As you enter into the battlefields of the valley of the shadow of death, know with all certainty that The LORD GOD Almighty is with you!²

III. A SCRIPTURE OF ENCOURAGEMENT - PSALM 23:1-6

- 1: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.
- 3: He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.
- 4: 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.
- 5: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
- 6: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

IV. INTRODUCTION

My brothers, I stand before you as a chaplain of your most holy Faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST, My purpose is to impart to you The Word of GOD on the eve of your entry into battle. I am not a man of military arms skilled in the arts of earthly battlefields that you will face tomorrow. I am, however, a soldier of The Cross skilled in the use of spiritual armor on spiritual battlefields of this life. And so I stand before you as your servant with the desire to strengthen your hearts, give peace to your minds and bring assurance of eternal life to your souls.

But how shall I accomplish these goals? Who can we look up to as an example of a GOD-fearing American soldier that shows us how to take comfort from the Word of GOD and His loving grace even in the midst of warfare? The answer is well known:

¹ 1, “The Genius of Chrysostom’s Preaching.” Carl A. Volz. Christianity Today, Issue 44, Volume XIII, Number 4, p 24. From a prayer with which St. John Chrysostom routinely began his sermons.

George Washington!³ George Washington was a great American patriot. He was a brave and honorable combat officer in the French and Indian War. He was the steadfast and upright General of the American Continental Armies in our nation's War for Independence. He was a mighty patriot and tireless servant of our people as the first President of the United States of America under our Federal Constitution.

But more than all these, George Washington was a faithful and a devout Christian. And it was his faith in GOD that caused the Hand of Providence to employ him in so many noble ways throughout his earthly life in the service. And of all his recorded public and private words, perhaps the most stirring are found in his personal prayer book, to which I shall bring us presently. Of PSALM 23, one theologian once observed that men of faith through the ages have received great "peace, contentment and trust" from the psalmist who wrote these holy and inspired Words. And GOD desires that all of you should also "come to share the psalmist's ...[same unshakable] confidence" in His love for you, which are as GOD's healing touch for all our "grief, sadness and doubt!"⁴

Now it just so happens that there are roughly six entries in the text which I found for Washington's prayer journal entries for a Sunday morning. And there just happens to be six verses in PSALM 23. Let us walk together and pair these two sources together – verse and prayer journal entry, verse and prayer journal entry, and see what great comfort we may receive from our LORD GOD, Who alone is our Great Good Shepherd!

V. PSALM 23:1 – THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD

PSALM 23:1 declares, "The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want."⁵ Washington wrote, "Almighty GOD, and most merciful Father, Who didst command the children of Israel to offer a daily sacrifice to Thee, that thereby they might glorify and praise Thee for Thy protection both night and day, receive O Lord, my mourning sacrifice which I now offer up to Thee;"⁶

² 2, KJV, PSALM 23:1-6.

³ 4, "America's God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations." William J. Federer , p 634-666. History and quotes of George Washington, which reveal a deep and active Christian faith.

⁴ 3, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, PSALM 23, p 503-504, My Shepherd [introduction].

⁵ 2, KJV, PSALM 23:1.

⁶ 4, "America's God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations." William J. Federer. Entry from

Thus, The LORD is our Shepherd and we shall not want. How so? When we praise and glorify GOD with the humble prayers of our hearts, He is with us both night and day to cover us with His Hand of loving protection! And in this great comfort we may place our trust, that our Lord JESUS CHRIST assure us in JOHN 10:1, “I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep!”⁷ Truly, as it is written, The LORD is our Shepherd!

VI. PSALM 23:2 – HE LEADETH US BESIDE STILL WATERS

PSALM 23:2 tells us, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”⁸ Washington continued, “I yield Thee humble and hearty thanks, that Thou hast preserved me from the dangers of the night past and brought me to the light of this day, and the comfort thereof, a day which is consecrated to Thine own service and for Thine own honour.”⁹

Thus, The LORD makes us to lie down in green pastures and leads us besides the still waters. How so? When we offer up our earnest thanks to GOD for His blessings and love, He brings us through from the dark of night into the light of day, always comforting us, for we are His servants! So King David writes of GOD's deliverance in PSALM 18:18, “He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, Thou [O My GOD] liftest me up above those that rise up against me: Thou [O LORD] hast delivered me from the violent man!”¹⁰ Truly, as it is written, He leadeth us beside still waters!

VII. PSALM 23:3 – HE LEADETH US IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

PSALM 23:3 says, “He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.”¹¹ Washington further cried out, “Let my heart therefore gracious GOD be so affected with the glory and majesty of it, that I may not do mine own works but wait on Thee, and discharge those weighty duties Thou required of

George Washington's personal prayer book for “SUNDAY MORNING,” p 656, paragraph 1.

⁷ 2, KJV, JOHN 10:1.

⁸ 2, KJV, PSALM 23:2.

⁹ 4, “America's God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations.” William J. Federer. Entry from George Washington's personal prayer book for “SUNDAY MORNING,” p 656, paragraph 2.

¹⁰ 2, KJV, PSALM 18:48.

¹¹ 2, KJV, PSALM 23:3.

me;”¹² Thus, The LORD restores our souls and leads us in the paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake when we seek Him. How so?

When we lay aside our own works and wills to worship GOD, confessing our humanity and His majesty, He pours out His grace upon us, that we may serve Him boldly and courageously in all that He would have us do! This is why St. Paul declares of GOD’s restoring love towards us in EPHESIANS 1:6-7, “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in [His Son] The Beloved. In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace [in our Lord JESUS CHRIST]!”¹³ Truly, as it is written, He leadeth us in the paths of righteousness!

VIII. PSALM 23:4 – WE WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THOU ART WITH US

PSALM 23:4 declares, “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.”¹⁴ Washington went on, “And since Thou art a GOD of pure eyes, and will be sanctified in all who draw nearer to Thee, Who dost not regard the sacrifice of fools, nor hear sinners who tread in Thy courts, pardon I beseech Thee, my sins, remove them from Thy presence, as far as the east is from the west, and accept of me for the merits of Thy Son JESUS CHRIST,”¹⁵ Thus, although we walk through the very valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil: for GOD is with us; His rod and staff comfort us. How so?

When we repent of our sins and receive Divine pardon through the sacrifice that JESUS CHRIST The Son of GOD made for us on The Cross, GOD Himself walks with us through life’s trials to deliver us from all evil and fear. GOD comforts us with the assurance that even earthly death will never separate our souls from dwelling in His holy presence forever in Heaven! So St. Paul declares our deliverance from evil by the loving sacrifice of CHRIST on our behalf in GALATIANS 1:4, “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of GOD and

¹²4, “America’s God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations.” William J. Federer. Entry from George Washington’s personal prayer book for “SUNDAY MORNING,” p 657, paragraph 1.

¹³2, KJV, EPHESIANS 1:6-7.

¹⁴2, KJV, PSALM 23:4.

¹⁵4, “America’s God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations.” William J. Federer. Entry from George Washington’s personal prayer book for “SUNDAY MORNING,” p 657, paragraph 2.

our Father!”¹⁶ Truly, as it is written, we will fear no evil, for Thou art with us!

IX. PSALM 23:5 – THOU ANOINTEST OUR HEADS WITH OIL

PSALM 23:5 tells us, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”¹⁷ See how Washington humbles himself before GOD with these words, “That when I come into Thy temple and compass Thine altar, my prayer may come before Thee as incense, and as I desire Thou wouldst hear me calling upon Thee in my prayers, so give me peace to hear the calling on me in Thy Word, that it may be wisdom, righteousness, reconciliation and peace to the saving of my soul in the day of the Lord JESUS [CHRIST].”¹⁸ Thus, The LORD Himself prepares a table of joy and deliverance for us even in the presence of our enemies, for His own hand anoints our heads with precious oil, His angels pouring upon us overflowing rivers of blessing and strength. How so?

When we seek our Maker in Holy Scripture and pour out our prayers in repentance to Him in The Name of our Saviour JESUS CHRIST, GOD pours out upon us pardon, peace, righteousness, wisdom and eternal salvation! Therefore David sings out to the heavens in PSALM 9:1-3, “I will praise Thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy Name, O Thou Most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at Thy Presence!”¹⁹ Truly, as it is written, Thou anointest our heads with oil!

X. PSALM 23:6 – WE SHALL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER

PSALM 23:6 says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of The LORD for ever.”²⁰ Note finally how Washington petitions The Almighty, “Grant that I may hear... [Thy Word] with reverence, receive it with meekness, mingle it with faith, and that it may accomplish in me gracious GOD, the good work for which Thou hast sent it. Bless my family, kindred,

¹⁶ 2, KJV, GALATIANS 1:4.

¹⁷ 2, KJV, PSALM 23:5.

¹⁸ 4, “America’s God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations.” William J. Federer. Entry from George Washington’s personal prayer book for “SUNDAY MORNING,” p 657, paragraph 3.

¹⁹ 2, KJV, PSALM 9:1-3.

²⁰ 2, KJV, PSALM 23:6.

friends and country, be our GOD and guide this day and forever for His sake, Who lay down in the grave and arose again for us, JESUS CHRIST our Lord. Amen”²¹ Thus, goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives; and we shall dwell in the very presence of The LORD for ever. How so?

When we hear GOD’s Word speaking to us in reverence, meekness and faith, GOD’s grace works His will in our lives to accomplish all that He ordains for us. Note then that the goodness and mercy of GOD brings forth through us Divine deliverance also for our families, our friends, our people and our very nation! For this reason St. John writes of the great goodness and mercy of JESUS CHRIST our Messiah in JOHN 3:15-16, “That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For GOD so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!”²² Truly, as it is written, we shall dwell in the house of The LORD forever!

XI. IN CLOSING

And so, as you men - servants of GOD and sons of a grateful nation - shall tomorrow enter an earthly field of battle, know this with full certainty: that GOD Himself shall walk with you in whatever trials you may face. And though the foe will try to resist you, you shall prevail. You shall prevail even in the face of suffering. You shall prevail even in the face of death. For either you shall return home to an earthly country thankful for your brave sacrifices to defend her GOD-given liberties! Or you shall return home to that eternal Kingdom of GOD in Heaven - there to dwell forever in unspeakable joy and peace in the very presence of our Lord JESUS CHRIST!

GOD Himself is our faithful Shepherd, watching over us with His tender care, when we turn in faith to Him with humbleness and trust. For then our Maker will lead us "into rest and reviving, ...[through] the struggles of life, and through the dangerous places" that we are called to walk through on this earth. For your "head is [then] anointed with perfumed oil ...[and your] every need is completely satisfied!" And GOD Himself

²¹ 4, “America's God And Country Encyclopedia Of Quotations.” William J. Federer. Entry from George Washington’s personal prayer book for “SUNDAY MORNING,” p 657, paragraph 4-5.

shall ordain that "every moment of... [your] life will be filled with GOD's richest blessings!"²³

And when you, being assured of eternal life at The Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, come to the gates of Heaven, you shall be embraced with love and joy by The LORD Himself! For then you shall be as a "guest of honor at GOD's house... [and] under GOD's never ending love forever!" (12) Therefore, do not leave this room without securing your earthly life and eternal soul in the hands of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, that you confess Him to be your Savior and the very Son of GOD and that you repent of your sins!

Let us close by praying together these words of comfort from PSALM 23:1-6 together, followed by a prayer of blessing: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. 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. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever!"²⁴ Let us knee to receive GOD's blessing: "The grace of The Lord JESUS CHRIST, and the love of GOD, and the communion of The HOLY GOST, be with you all. Amen...!"²⁵

²² 2, KJV, JOHN 3:15-16.

²³ 3, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Commentary on PSALM 1-4, 5-6, p 504.

²⁴ 2, KJV, PSALM 23:1-6.

²⁵ 2, KJV, II CORINTHIANS 13:14.

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