

Death Is Only a Shadow

by Carter Conlon

Psalm 23 chronicles the Christian life, from the knowledge of God's love to walking through the valley of the shadow of death, where Christians must trust in God's presence and provision.

Duration: 59:17

Scripture: Psalm 23:1-2, Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 46:10, Matthew 6:33, John 10:27-28, James 1:4

Topics: "Death"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of progressing in the Christian walk beyond the initial stages of faith. Many believers tend to stay in the shallow knowledge of verses 1, 2, and 3, where God's love, provision, satisfaction, and healing are experienced. However, verse 4 is a crucial part of the Christian journey that cannot be avoided. It is a valley experience where believers may face challenges and difficulties, but it is necessary for growth and for God's plan to be fulfilled in their lives. The speaker encourages listeners to embrace verse 4 and trust in God's leading and righteousness for His name's sake.

Transcript

This message is one of the Times Square Church pulpit series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing World Challenge, P.O. Box 260, Lindell, Texas 75771, or calling 903-963-8626.

You are welcome to make additional cassettes of this message for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission, existing copyright laws apply. In Psalm 23, I'm going to be approaching it in a way perhaps going to be completely different for some people.

My message this morning is entitled, Death is Only a Shadow. Death is only a shadow. Father, I thank you, God, for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. We thank you for the quickening power of the Holy Spirit that takes this word and makes it alive in the hearts and minds and spirit of each one of us who are gathered here today and those who will be hearing this in the coming days. Mighty God, show us truth that sets us free, free from the lies of the enemy and the confines, God, of all experience we may have known or had before coming to the knowledge of Christ.

Bring us deeper into the knowledge of our Savior. We thank you for this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

Psalm 23, I suppose one of the most beloved psalms in all of the Bible. More people know this particular psalm who are even unsaved can quote it from beginning to end. There are numerous renditions of psalm written about Psalm 23.

I believe that Psalm 23, when you really take a good look at it, chronicles the Christian life, the entire Christian experience. The Christian life begins in verse 1 where David says, The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. The Christian life begins when the knowledge that God loves you and will provide what is needed for all who come to him.

Beloved, you don't come to God without that knowledge. You can't possibly come without first understanding the great and the incredible depth of God's love that he would become a man, die on the cross and pay the price for your sins. Not only is he our shepherd, which is an indication of his heart for everyone who comes to him, but it's in his heart to provide everything that we need.

David says, The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. God will provide everything that I need in my life. Of course, this is quite often the gospel that people hear when they come to Christ.

It's the introductory statement, as it is, to a life of living for God and allowing God to be honored in and to us. Without this basic foundational knowledge, it's very difficult to progress. If we don't know that God will provide, then we will make attempts to provide for ourselves in the efforts of our own flesh.

And, of course, that will fail because we can't build a kingdom that we can't even see. It's impossible. Verse 2, it says, He makes me to lie down in green pastures and leads me beside the still waters.

The very presence of God in my life satisfies and brings peace to my soul. He makes me to lie down. The word that he brings to my heart.

And many of you, that's why you come to Times Square Church perhaps Sunday morning and hopefully some other services Sunday and throughout the week. Because when we are away from God for any amount of time, there's that natural human troubling that wants to come into our spirit. There's that restlessness that wants to, once again, find its foothold and make its mark in our lives.

But when we come to God and we hear his word of reassurance and strength that establishes our ways, he leads us again into good pasture and brings us to a place where we can rest. Mark the end, James says, of the perfect man. The end of that man is rest.

The man, the woman that God has done a work in has been brought into a place of peace and rest and strong confidence. That's why David later on in life could say, even if the seas roar and the mountains fall, my heart is fixed. I will trust in God.

I'm not going to be moved by these afflictions and by these adversities. Psalm 112 said the man whose ways are fixed upon God is not moved even by evil tidings that come his way. His heart has been established in the ways of God and the blessing of God has come upon his life.

Verse 3 tells us again that he heals and restores and leads us into truth. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

You see, when you and I gave our lives to Jesus Christ, he predetermined to do a work in us. There was something that God had in his mind for you and for me even before we were formed in our mother's womb. And the moment we received him as Lord and Savior, he set into motion a plan that he alone can perfect in us and take us through.

And he began to lead us on a path of righteousness, which is really the outworking of God's righteousness within us. He began to lead us in that way, not because of us, but because of his name's sake. Jesus said, these are mine and I will be glorified in them.

I will be glorified in those that are mine. I will lead them in a pathway of righteousness for my name's sake. Now, all these three verses are preparation for something that many, many Christian people never really fully come to understand.

Verse 1, he loves us and provides for us. Verse 2, he satisfies and brings peace to every longing soul. Verse 3, he heals, restores and leads us into truth for his name's sake.

And then all of a sudden we come to verse 4. And this is the point where so many people stop in their Christian walk. They don't go any further than verse 1, 2 and 3. When they hit verse 4, it's as if they're unable to go forward and they back up and go back to verse 1 again. I remember years ago that as I used to travel as an evangelist or revivalist, and I'd go into different churches and see people 20, 30, 40 years in the Lord, still trying to go back to that infancy stage when they first met Christ.

Trying to stay in that shallow rain puddle, as it is, of knowledge. Not ever wanting to go deep into things of God. Failing to understand what verse 4 is really all about.

There is a verse 4, you know, in the Christian life. You cannot escape it. If you are going to go on with God, you've got to walk through verse 4, just like David did.

You cannot escape it. There's no getting away from it. 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. Now verse 1, 2 and 3, the sole purpose of this knowledge of Jesus is now to bring us to verse 4. Now verse 4 can seem to be a strange place for the Christian person. Coming to the house of God and you say, Well God, I thought you loved me, I thought you were going to provide for me.

You satisfy, you bring peace, you heal, restore, you lead into truth. And now, I'm in the deepest valley of my entire life. I'm walking with you, I want to live for you.

God, you know I'm willing to give up things that are a hindrance to my relationship to you. Lord, I've yielded as much as I know to yield. And now I find myself in the deepest valley that I've ever experienced in my life.

And it seems that death is all around me. It's a strange place sometimes for the person who's not aware of what God is doing. Obviously, and quite often we speak about the verse 4 being the place of physical death.

Or passing through the waters of death into eternity. And it can mean a natural death. And yes, because of Christ, natural death no longer has to be feared.

One thing is certain in this room. It is absolutely certain. Should the Lord tarry, everyone in this house is going to die one day.

We're all going to die. That's a certain thing. But when you come to Christ, you don't have to be afraid of that anymore.

The Apostle Paul speaks of it as just a passing. It's just a moment. And once we're absent from the body, we are in the presence of the Lord.

It's an incredible thing when you behold that. I was driving in a car one time, and I found it rather humorous. I don't remember the exact circumstance, but we swerved somewhere.

And perhaps we're close to some kind of an accident. And everybody in the car, we're all Christians, was saying, Oh, isn't God good? He protected us and kept us, and we could have all been killed. And I was just sitting there kind of grinning, and I said, Yeah, just think of it.

We could be around the throne right now with the seraphim and cherubim, worshiping God for all of eternity. How wonderful it is to escape that and be left here on this dismal planet called Earth. A natural death is not to be feared.

Folks, I'm not afraid to die. It's a wonderful thing to be able to say that. I think of the beloved songwriter Iris Stanfill, who wrote so many wonderful songs that we sing in the church today.

Like, he washed my eyes with tears. A man who went through very real difficulties throughout his life. And from that difficulty came some beautiful songs that we are still singing today.

I think of the story of when he died. He had a heart attack. He called together his wife and his daughter.

He was in his living room, laid down on the couch. And as he passed into eternity with his wife and daughter at his side, he just laid there and worshiped God. It's an incredible thing to pass out of this life and into the next.

And not be afraid of death. It's wonderful to be delivered from the fear of death. Death has no more fear to those who know Christ.

When we're absent from this body, that's why Paul the Apostle said, I have a desire to depart. I want to go. This is only temporary.

This is only a vapor that's here for a season, then passes away. This is not the all in all of anything. This is only the beginning.

I'm only in the train station waiting for the train to pull out. I'm in the airport waiting for my flight to leave. But I'm going to a place where there's never going to be an end.

There's going to be sunshine all the time. There will never be sickness. There'll be no complainers there.

There'll be not one single backbiter. There'll be no arguments there. There'll be no sorrow there.

There'll be no sadness there. I'm going to a place for any time because there's no day and night anymore. I can leave my house on Golden Avenue and go down to the throne of God and raise my hands and sing the songs of Zion.

Hallelujah. O death, Paul said, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? Where is your victory? Christ rose from the dead, and those that are here shall also rise from the grave and be with Him forever. Natural death can be referred to in verse 4 of Psalm 23, but I believe the valley of the shadow of death or the valley of death's shadow is much more than this.

It's interesting to note that Reese's Chronological Bible places Psalm 23 as given to David by the Holy Spirit just prior to Saul's first attempt to kill him. For Samuel 18.11 says, Saul cast a javelin, for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice.

The shepherd who would be king up to this point had known only victory and rest, and now he was about to enter a valley with shadows of death all about him. An incredible thing. You remember Samuel coming into the house of Jesse and anointing David.

Now, David knew God had touched him. He knew the Holy Ghost was upon him. A sovereign strength was given to him that was not found and can never be found in those who are apart from God.

He was given courage beyond the peers of his generation, even beyond the armies of his generation, to run into a valley and face a giant that had caused fear and trembling in the whole host of Israel's armies. He was able to sing songs. The Bible tells us that when he would sing and play, there was an evil spirit that had come upon Saul.

And when David would worship God, that evil spirit, in a sense, had to be abated. And peace and rest would come into the life of a man who now had lost the presence of God. He had known victory, and he knew he was to be king.

The promises of God were as real to him as they are to you and I today. We are promised that when we come to Christ, we'll be given strength. We are promised that no longer will fear govern or reign our lives.

We are promised that we'll be taken to places of plenteousness. We are promised that we'll be given strength where we are weak, and knowledge where we formerly had no knowledge. We are given the promises of God that one day we'll rule and reign with Christ.

And until that day, God will keep us and sustain us in places and a place where we cannot be touched by the powers of hell and darkness, but we will be an example of the life that he offers to all who trust in him. In the New Testament, Romans chapter 5, verse 17, tells us that by one man's offense, that's Adam's offense in the Garden of Eden, death reigned. Death reigned.

The word death is thanatos in the Greek, and it means separation from the blessed influence of God. Death reigned when Adam's sin entered the human race, and the human race began to be cut off from that enlivening power of God, or the blessed influence of God, and death began to reign in all of humanity. Death meant finality.

Death meant limitations in life. The rule of death would tell you that the circumstance you're born in, you'll never rise out of it. You have certain mental limitations that you cannot ever ascribe to go beyond.

Born into poverty, you will live in poverty. Born into a certain position in life, that will be your position and station for all of your life. Death means limitation.

Death meant that in your life and in mine, at some point, no matter how hard we tried, the bar was higher than any attempt I could make to leap it. Try like I may, because of the death reigning in me, there are certain elements of character, certain things that I would desire to ascribe to that I could make a few jumps perhaps in my own strength, but the bar would always rise. And no matter how high I could jump, the bar would always go higher.

And the reign of death meant that at some point, there was a leap that I would not be able to make. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 7, that death had a ministry. He says that death had a ministration written and engraved in stones.

In verse 9, Paul calls it a ministry of condemnation. The ministry of death, which was represented by the law, was sent to condemn all of our attempts to be restored to God's favor through anything that we, apart from God, are. The ministry of the law was a ministration, Paul says, of death.

And try as we may, there is not one man who could fulfill the law. All, Isaiah said clearly, have fallen short. We've all sinned and fallen short in the glory of God.

We see the issue perhaps of the woman caught in adultery in the New Testament when she was brought to Jesus. And I've often heard it preached that all the people standing there were just religious hypocrites. I don't fully believe that.

Yes, there's hypocrisy in every crowd. But in that crowd, there were also people who wanted to do right, who wanted to fulfill the law in their heart. They wanted to walk in all of the commandments of the law.

They wanted to obey. They wanted to rise above the limitations as it is of the natural man and to be able to ascribe to the glory of God. And when Jesus said to them, Whoever is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.

And folks, I want to tell you what caused the people to drop the stones. The Bible said from the eldest to the younger. The conviction of the Holy Ghost came.

And even though every man there, many of them were zealous to do right as they saw it in the sight of God, there was not one in that crowd who had fulfilled the law. The law had done its ministry and the law had condemned every man in the crowd because there was none that could fulfill the requirements of God in his own strength. Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 14 tells us that the devil had the power of death.

That means the knowledge of our limitations without God at his disposal. And verse 15 tells us that because of this power of death at work in us, that people became afraid and all their lifetime were in subject to bondage. Now, the bondage, the word bondage means that state of man in which he is prevented from freely possessing and enjoying his life.

The devil had the power of the law, the power of death at his command. And no matter how hard any of us would try, he could rightfully look at us and say, no, you failed here, you failed there, you'll never make it, you'll never do it, you'll never, you'll never, you'll never, you'll never, you'll never. And he had the power of the law as it is behind him, which gave him a legal right to condemn any who tried to be righteous apart from the righteousness that only God can give.

And it kept all in fear of death. Death was all around. I want you to think for a moment of David.

He walks now from victory in verse 3 and honor and sweet worship, to terror, to the cave, to drooling like a madman at a foreign king's gate, to even ending up preparing to fight in the wrong army. From all this supposed victory and invincibility, he now finds himself on the road to the kingship that's been promised him, but through a valley he never anticipated. And the scripture clearly tells us that David really didn't fully understand what it was that God was doing in his life, and he really at this point didn't have the knowledge of how God was going to take him through.

And all of a sudden he finds himself in the very valley that the Holy Spirit had spoken to him about before Saul's first attempt to kill him. See, God will always reveal what he's about to do. We may not understand it, but he will reveal it.

He will tell us, and with our limited understanding, we will try to walk in the truth as it's been revealed to our hearts. Think of David. Think of him clearly.

The sweet psalmist killing Goliath, having the favor of much of the populace in Israel, singing songs that caused the devil to flee, knowing in his heart that he's been anointed for leadership, now fleeing, drooling, ending up in a cave. And folks, I'll tell you something, that's how some of us feel sometimes. Oh, yeah, we come to church and put on our suits and sing our songs and open our Bibles and shake people's hands, but we go home and act like a madman at the king's gate, complaining and moaning, God, why are you doing this to me? Why are you leading me here? I'm afraid.

Fear seems to be on every side. I thought you said you're not giving me a spirit of fear. Then why is fear on every side? The things that I didn't even battle with at one point are now all around me.

It seems like I'm in a valley, and it's the farthest down I've ever been, and death seems to be all around me, mocking me, laughing at me, threatening me. Oh, God, what is it that you're doing in my life? And that's exactly where David was, because when you read some of the songs that he had written round about these times of indecision, and yes, there's a turning point as you follow them in progression, but there was that season of questioning God. What is this all about? Why do I have to go through this? Why is it necessary to go through this valley of the shadow of death? And tell me now, at what point do you think that David finally realized the truth of the words which the Holy Spirit had already given him? The Holy Spirit had told him that even in the valley, when you're at your lowest and the bar seems to be at its highest, when things that you thought you may have been able to attain are now so far out of reach.

Folks, it's like standing on a runway in an Olympic event, and the bar you have to jump is higher than the ceiling of this sanctuary. And you look at it and you say, Man, there may have been a chance ten years ago, but now I'm so low that it's absolutely impossible. And there's no shortage of people around that will tell you that too as well.

The devil will use everybody he can and say, Well, you'll never make it. You can't do it. You're just too far down.

He says, I'm in the valley, and the death that wants to reign in me is all around me, trying to speak to my life and trying to speak into my heart and trying to discourage my confidence in God. At what point was it that David finally realized that the death which he had so feared was now only a shadow of its former self? You see, there's a reason why the Holy Ghost called it when he gave it to David, Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. There's a difference between death and the shadow of death.

Now, I want to explain this to you as simply as I can. I want you to catch this. There is a big difference between getting hit by a bus and getting hit by the shadow of a bus.

I think you're starting to catch it now. If I have a choice, I'd much rather be hit by the shadow of a bus going by than by the bus itself. And the Holy Ghost is speaking now to David.

In 1 Samuel 16, 13, it tells us that he was anointed in the midst of his brethren, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. Now with God's Spirit upon him and the promises of God being fulfilled by God himself in and through him, death with all its limitations could roar, and death could pass by with all it wanted to, but now it was only a shadow, a powerless shadow at that of its former self. Do you understand what this means? There's a time, there's a season when God will take us into a place where we have to face our deepest fears, we have to face our own inadequacies, we have to face the biggest enemies that we will ever face in our entire life.

And they will roar at us, and they will threaten us, and they will come against us with everything they've got, but they are only a shadow now. They have no power. All they can try to do is block out the signs just for a moment and try to get you to believe they can actually conquer your life.

But listen to me, beloved. They can no more conquer you than they can conquer the God who now lives in you. They can't conquer you.

Your fears can't conquer you. The power of hell can't conquer you. There's no devil can conquer you.

There's no circumstance in life that can conquer you. There's no weakness that can keep you down. There's no limitation to God and what he can do in your life.

Death is only a shadow. It was defeated at the cross. Hallelujah! Christ defeated death when he rose from the grave.

Death shuddered because death now knew it had no power over all of humanity that would come to Christ. When I received Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost came into my life, and by the power of God's Spirit, I was quickened and raised from the dead with him. All death can do, like a passing bus, is make noise and roar at me.

But it can't touch me, because the hand of God is on my life. Hallelujah! The writer of Hebrews says it this way in chapter 2, verse 14 and 15, For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death, as is Christ, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Christ came to deliver us from the fear that we would never enjoy this life in him, that we would never realize the potential that God has planted by his Spirit and his promises in each and every one of us.

We were sent. Christ was sent and delivered us. He broke the one who had the power of death.

That means the devil's voice means nothing to me now. It means nothing to me. I love it.

My daughter is not little anymore, but when she was little, we had a visiting minister and his wife in our house one time, and she was just three years old. And out of the mouths of babes, doesn't the Scripture say that was perfected praise? And this minister's wife went into the bedroom that night to tuck her in. She

asked if she could do it.

We said, sure, fine. She tucked her in, and she's just a little kid with pigtails. She's laying in bed, and she said to her, Katie, does the devil ever come and try to tell you lies and make you afraid? And Katie says, oh, yes, he does.

He does a lot. And she says, what do you do when that happens? She looked in the eye and said, I tell him to go right back to hell where he belongs. Hallelujah.

Out of the mouths of babes, that was perfected praise. Would be to God we could all learn that lesson. Would be to God that we could understand that His power is only a shadow now.

And if God's going to use my life, He's got to take me through the valley of the shadow of death. I'm never going to escape it. Folks, don't make the mistake of turning back and trying to become a baby Christian all over again.

Don't make the mistake of thinking you can live in immaturity and ever understand and know the fullness of what God desires to put upon your life. If you're going to live for God, there is a time where you're going to have to understand what it means to die with Him first, before you can live with Him. A time when you've got to face your fears.

A time when you've got to go through the limitations. You've got to walk into the midst of every lie that has ever been spoken over your life. Things that have been said about you can't, you won't, you never will be, you'll never change, you'll never make it.

God's going to take you right through the valley of those shadows. Right through the valley. And not one of them is going to touch you if you will keep your trust and confidence in Him.

You're going to walk right through the midst of them all. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

He says, 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. Now, I've heard a lot of sermons about the rod and the staff. The rod of correction.

The staff of protection. And how a shepherd gently nudges and leads. Folks, I had a sheep farm.

I've raised over a hundred sheep. Let me tell you, it doesn't work. It's humorous to hear these things.

You can tap a sheep all you want. That thing gets it in his head to go left, he's going left. Folks, I want to tell you what the rod and the staff are all about.

It is simply the presence of God. It is His comfort. Thy rod and thy staff.

He says, Lord, it is Your comfort that's going to keep me. It is Your promises. It is Your very presence.

The fact that Your power is with me. The fact that You are my shepherd and I shall not want. The fact, oh God, that You've not sent me to walk alone in the midst of my fears and troubles and difficulties.

You are with me every step of the way. And that comfort. And that comfort alone is what's going to bring me in and through and up the other side of this valley.

It's Your comfort. The fact that You said, I will never leave You nor forsake You. You said every thing that rises against me, that I have the right now to condemn it.

This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. Your presence and Your comfort are all that I need. To take me through the valley of the deepest of my fears and my former limitations.

Verse 5, he says, Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. David said, there's voices on all sides.

And they're telling me I'll never make it. I'm too weak, it can't be done. There's a narrow corridor that leads to that life of Christ.

And it's like initiation, I guess, into the army. Perhaps used to be. Maybe that's not the best example to use now.

But having to walk through that corridor and there are people on all sides. Shouting, telling you things you can't do or places you can't go or things you're never going to be. Trying to stop, trying to test as it is your determination to go on.

Voices on all sides when you begin to go on with God and are led into this valley of difficulty, this valley of the shadow of death, are there to tell you you're never going to make it. They're there to tell you you're too weak. They're there to tell you it can't be done.

They're there to tell you there's no hope for you. They're there to discourage you and tell you, what's the sense of pressing on? You're never going to amount to anything. You trusted in God, but He saw something in you you're not even aware of.

And there's every kind of lying voice under the sun to try to stop you from becoming what God has destined you to be. Yet David says, in the midst of them, you prepare a banquet for me. Incredible.

Now, that banquet is none other than the promises of God. It's the table of His bread. David said, in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, where all my enemies are all around me, you prepare a banquet for me.

You anoint my head with oil, which means, God, you touch me time and again with your presence. I am daily aware of your presence in my life and upon my life. I don't understand my circumstances.

I don't know what tomorrow holds for me, but I do know one thing. I understand that you are with me. I understand that your hand has touched my life and that you have anointed me for a purpose.

I understand, O God, that you have put a banquet of promises before me. And by these promises, you said I'm going to become a partaker of the very nature of God. David says, it's so much that it's more than enough.

He says, in my cup runneth over. I mean, it's more than enough to do what you've called me to do. Hallelujah! Have you ever gotten to that place in your valley of difficulty, where the shadow of death is all around you, where you can say, God, you have given me more than enough to meet the need that rests before me? Look at Psalm 18 with me for just a moment, if you will.

Psalm 18, verse 28. David says, For thou wilt light my candle. The Lord my God will lighten my darkness.

Now, this psalm is written just after now his deliverance from the hand of Saul and all of his enemies. Psalm 23 is just before. Psalm 18 is just after.

Look at the difference now. For thou, verse 28, wilt light my candle. The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.

For by thee I have run through a troop, and by my God have I leaped over a wall. David says, I was given strength. I was given strength to run through the gauntlet of my enemies.

I was given strength to leap over every barricade in this valley of the shadow of death that the devil tried to put before me. As for God, he says, his way is perfect, and the word of the Lord is tried, and he's a buckler or a sustainer to all those that trust in him. For who is God? Save the Lord.

And who is a rock? Save our God. It is God that girds me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like hinds feet and sets me upon my high places.

He teaches my hands to war so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation. Thy right hand is holding me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.

Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. I have pursued mine enemies and overtaken them, and neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise, and they are fallen under my feet.

For thou hast girded me with strength under the battle. Thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Look at verse 46.

He says, the Lord liveth and blessed me my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avenges me and subdues the people under me. He delivered me from mine enemies, verse 48.

Thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me. Thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Now, some say that man would be Saul, but I don't believe that.

David knew the battle was much more than this. There's a violent man that has attempted to overthrow the kingdom of God right from his beginning. And David said, God, you gave me strength, and you delivered me from the violent man.

Therefore, I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king, and shows mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed forevermore. You have to understand now, David is the lineage of Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus Christ, we are grafted into that very lineage. We are, in effect, the seed that David is speaking about. And David says, God gives great deliverance and shows mercy to his anointed and to his seed forevermore.

Great mercy and great deliverance from the violent man. You and I have a choice to make, beloved. When God says, you can, and the devil says, you can't, tell me who you're going to listen to.

Who are you going to listen to? If you're going to listen to God, you're going to go into the valley of facing your fears. I believe it's a testing and proving ground for everyone that God will use greatly in this kingdom. I don't personally believe there's any escaping the valley of the shadow of death.

We have to die to anything we thought we were. All ambition has to go. All self-reliance has to be put under foot.

In this valley of the shadow of death, it's only the sustaining power of God that will get you through. And when you come out the other side, you have a message for your generation. You have a message that God gives great deliverance and mercy to those who place their confidence in Him.

God makes my feet like hinds feet. In other words, like a mountain goat and gives me the power to climb to high places. God gives me the power to run through a troop.

In other words, if the enemy sends a host against me, David says, I'll not be afraid. He gives me the power to run right through the middle of it. God gives me the power to leap any wall that the enemy would try to build around me or over me or try to encompass my path with.

God gives me the power. I can't be boxed in. I can't be stopped.

I can't be slowed down. Because it's not about me. It's about God.

It's about what He is destined to do through my life to bring glory to His name. Let hell shout all it wants. Let the voice of the darkness cast their shadows over my life.

It's only a shadow. It can't touch me and can't touch you. Do you understand? The book of Exodus, when they're in the wilderness, God told Moses, I want to build a tabernacle, a dwelling place.

Portable dwelling place as it is for the nation of Israel as we travel together. And he said, now announce this to the people and everybody who has a willing heart. Let them come and make an offering and give their lives to the service and the work of God.

That's an incredible thing. Because there were very, very specific instructions that were given in the building of this tabernacle and all of the veils and curtains and the lavers and the dishes and the mercy seat and all these things had to be constructed and they had to be exact because this was the dwelling place of God. This was a foreshadowing of Christ and His church.

And you can see when the call from Moses went out, there'd be a momentary hesitation among the people. Who possesses the skill to do such a thing? Who can design the dwelling place of God? And what if I head out and make mistakes? But the call is put out and the call always looks like an impossibility. How can I do this? How dare I ever even rise up and say, yeah, yeah, count me in.

Yeah, I'll design the mercy seat. You see, people had an actual fear of God. Many did, at least in those days.

And how do I dare touch these holy things? I don't have the skill. I don't possess the knowledge. And I believe that when the call first went out, that would be exactly what would go through the hearts of most of the people as they go home to their tents and begin to think this over.

Look out of their tent and see the pillar of fire, see the glory of God and say, oh God, how do I touch these holy things? How can this happen? I don't have, but I want to. You see, it was a foreshadowing of the New Testament. I see the next day or days later, people coming to Moses and say, my heart is willing.

My heart is, I want to do this thing. The scripture says those who had a willing heart, those whose heart had been stirred up and were willing came and they willingly offered not only the gold and silver and these things for the building of the tabernacle, but they offered themselves. And then all of a sudden there's a marvelous switch in this passage of scripture.

If you have time, Exodus 35, chapter 35, 36, some time to read it. And all of a sudden we begin to see God, the scripture says, put in these workers the wisdom. He put in these workers the ability, the cunning and the skill.

He, every worker, some became teachers of others, but he gave them the skill and he gave them the ability. And when they began to do the work, the scripture says at the end of chapter 36, that so much stuff began to come in from the camp of Israel to accomplish the work. They had to plead with Moses.

You have to stop the stuff. We have too much to work with. And so Moses put out a plea to the camp and said, please don't bring any more things into the work of God.

We have so much stuff. We're overflowing. We don't know what to do with it all.

David says, you anoint my head with oil. You prepare a banquet table for me in the presence of my enemies. And my cup overflows.

God, you're giving me so much stuff. You're putting so much in my life that it's overflowing me, even in the midst of my deepest trial, even in the midst of my own fears and my deepest struggles. God, you are planting within me everything I need to be what you called me to be.

And you're giving me so much that I can't contain it anymore. It's flowing over my borders. I've got to share it with others.

I've got to tell them, God, what you're doing in my life. I've got to tell them who you've been to me and how you've been faithful to me and how you will touch and keep and hold and sustain and keep all who call out to your name. If you will listen to God and let His Word and His presence comfort you, God is going to assign two friends to you that will never leave you.

Two friends. He says, I'm going to give you two friends. And they will never leave you.

They will follow you all the days of your life. Goodness and mercy. David says, surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

That means the farthest I walk, I'm walking through this valley of the shadow of death. I may have to go through it once, twice, three times, four times throughout my life. I don't know how many times I'm going to go through, but as many times as God deems it necessary to do the work that He wants to do through my life.

But when I get to the other side of that valley of the shadow of death, I'm going to look back. And every time I look back, I see two friends covering me, covering my back as it is, walking with me all the way. Two friends called goodness and mercy that God has assigned to my life that are going to follow me all the days of my life.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. And when the devil tries to accuse you and tries to lie to you and tell you you're not going to make it through your trial, say, listen, devil, talk to the friends that are following behind me.

Goodness and mercy. All the days of my life. Folks, if you will trust God, when you are 99 years old, should the Lord tell you, you're going to look back from the day you received Christ to where you are in your old age.

You're going to say, goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life. God has been good to me. God has been merciful to me.

Even when I didn't understand Him. Even when I was in confusion and despair, God was still there. He's not a fickle friend.

He sticks closer than a brother. And David said, not only that, but I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Goodness and mercy are behind me.

And the house of God, the eternal dwelling place of God is before me. How can I lose? Tell me. Who can rise against me? Tell me what power of hell can destroy me.

David says, goodness and mercy walk behind me. And the house of God is before me. I have a long table that's been set for me all through the valley of the shadow of death.

And on it are incredible promises. And I just stand there and eat while all these shadows whiz by. The shadows of the bus just go by, but the bus can't touch me.

And every once in a while, God just comes and touches me because He knows I need it. And I get to the end of the valley not worn out and exhausted. But I get to the end of the valley with my cup overflowing.

I come out of trial stronger than I went in. Because I've chosen to trust God. Amazing.

Amazing, amazing, amazing. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.

His grace, He said, has brought me safe thus far. And grace will lead me home. My other call this morning is simple.

It's just for people who want to say, Pastor, I'm getting up and I'm going with God. Death and all of its limitations are only a shadow. Lord Jesus, make me everything you've called me to be.

Take me everywhere you've destined me to go. Jesus, be all in me that you desire to be. I especially, especially give an altar invitation today for those who are in the valley of the shadow of death.

You've gone through verses 1, 2 and 3 in Psalm 23 and you're now in verse 4. Not understanding what's going on. The devil barking at you from all sides. Trying to convince you that there's some incredible failure in you somewhere that God has seen and He's rejected you.

Trying to tell you you're never going to make it or become anything or anybody. The promises of God are of no effect. But God says, no, no, no.

My very honor is at stake in bringing you through to everything I promised you. You have to understand this today. He stakes the honor of His name on bringing you and I through to everything that He's promised us that He's going to be in us.

The devil doesn't want you to know that. But if you're in the valley of the shadow of death, you are in a wonderful place. Because on the other side, you're going to come out with a cup that is so full, you're going to have something to say to your generation.

It's not going to be all just nice little platitudes. Nice little quick snap answers for everybody that's going through difficulty. You're going to say, no, grace brought me safe.

You know, when I was a younger pastor, you know, you're going through a hard time. When you come to young people, younger Christians, and you're going through a hard time, they just, they're like this. It flips through the Bible.

And they throw a promise at you. Or a condemnation half the time. And it's so quick with the answers.

I love the older folks. Especially the ones who walk with God. They have soft hands.

And I've been more encouraged through my walk with God by an older person from time to time, just sensing the hurt. Or sensing the despair that the devil wanted to plant in my heart. Just coming and taking my hands and saying, God has been faithful to me.

And God will be faithful to you. There's more theology in that than somebody reading me ten chapters of Scripture. Somebody has come through the valley.

I can always tell the ones that have come through the valley, there's something in their eyes. Something in their voice. The hard edge is gone.

It's become all Jesus and none of them. They have a message. It's implanted in them.

Their whole life has become the message. No longer rattling theology and trying to prove a point. They now know God.

It's an incredible thing. I want to be like that. But to be like that, I have to go through the valley of the shadow of death.

I'll never escape it. I'll be a fool to try. I'll be a fool to try to get around the very procedure that God uses to make me a man of God.

Of God. We want to keep the man part and still have the of God. But God says, no, I've got to get rid of the man part to make you of God.

In order to do that, I've got to take you through a place where you will see that there's no hope of you ever getting through without me. I'll take you to the very extreme of your limitations. And show you the bar is too high.

You can't jump it. But then I'll take you through. And none of the lying voices will touch you.

And you'll come out the other side with a testimony and a song. These are the people who reign with Christ. The people who reign with Christ are not the ones who run churches of 10,000 and 50 and 20,000.

People who reign with Christ are these people who have come through. They have this confidence and peace that nothing in the world can take away from them. They may not look like much, but they are kings and queens before God.

They are reigning already on this side of eternity, for those who can hear it. They have a cup that overflows and a testimony that's unshaken. They've walked through sorrow and trial and difficulty.

God has sustained them. And given them a feast of himself. If your desire is to be everything God called you to be, to go everywhere God called you to go, and to be everything in you that God called you to be, I'm going to ask you to come to this altar.

In the annex you can go up between the screens and we'll pray with you momentarily. But those in the main sanctuary of the Holy Spirit spoken to you, especially those who are in the valley, come join with me. We're going to pray together.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. His grace has brought me safe thus far. And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun. Praise God! I'll rest my feet. I once was lost, but now I'm found.

One thing never failed me yet, never failed me yet. Jesus' love has never failed me yet. This one thing I know, that wherever I go, Jesus' love has never failed me yet.

He's never failed me yet, never failed me yet. Jesus' love has never failed me yet. This one thing I know, that wherever I go, Jesus' love has never failed me yet.

He's never failed me yet, never failed me yet. Jesus' love has never failed me yet. This one thing I know, that wherever I go, Jesus' love has never failed me yet.

Now we're going to pray a very simple prayer this morning. And I want to tell you especially, there are people here that the devil and circumstance and life has told you that you'll never be anything. Or you'll never be a good father, good husband, good wife.

You'll never be intelligent. You'll never be able to clearly even preach the gospel or articulate the things of God. Folks, I want you to know the devil is a liar.

Jesus will make you everything that you ask Him to. He said to his disciples, you've asked me up to this point for nothing. Now ask in my name, ask the Father and He will give it to you.

He said that your joy might be full. He said, just ask me, but ask with a believing heart. Let's pray this simple prayer together.

Lord Jesus, I have a willing heart. And today I ask you to make me everything that you've called me to be. Take me everywhere that you've called me to go.

And be in me everything that you desire to be. I believe that because I ask, you will answer my prayer. And you will give me everything that I require that your name would be honored in and through my life.

You will take me through the valley of my deepest fears. And in the midst of that valley, you will put a banquet table before me. You will anoint my head with oil and my cup will overflow.

I believe today that at the end of my life, I'm going to look back and say, Goodness and mercy has followed me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of God forever. I believe today that death and all of its power is now defeated.

It's only a shadow. It can't touch me. It can't touch my life.

It can't touch what God is going to do in and through me anymore from this day forward and forever. Jesus, be glorified in and through my life. I believe this now with all of my heart.

And I shout hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Mighty God, thank You for what You're doing. I thank You, God, for the changed lives. I thank You for the changed homes.

I thank You, God, for the changed testimonies. I thank You for the strength and skills and wisdom You are giving. Holy Ghost, right this very moment, God, You are giving skills and wisdom.

You are releasing gifts into the lives of those that are placing their confidence and trust in You. Father, I thank You for it from the depths of my heart. And I say, Jesus, be glorified.

Let there be testimonies that can mark this day as the beginning of a life of abundance in God. Hallelujah. Thank You, Jesus.

Thank You, Lord. This is the conclusion of the message.

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