

Yea though I walk

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I.Macleod

[0 : 00] Book of Psalms to Psalm 23, and we'll look at the last section of the psalm. Last week we looked at verses 1 to 3, looking now at, just very briefly, at verses 4 to 6.

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 unwindest 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 forever.

Last week we looked at the first three verses, the first verses of great encouragement and great assurance. I think one of the things that we highlighted was the psalmist's great assurance as he looked at this great truth of the Lord is my shepherd.

But many people highlight a wonderful change that takes place in verse 4, because in verses 1, 2, and 3, the psalmist has been talking about the shepherd.

[1 : 06] He's been telling us that the Lord is my shepherd, I'll not want. He tells us what he makes us do, to lie down in green pastures, he restores my soul, and so on. So you see, in these first three verses, he's talking about the shepherd.

He's telling people about the shepherd. But in verse 4, there's a change in emphasis, because he talks to the shepherd. Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.

You see, there's this change of emphasis, moving away from talking about to actually talking to. And in a sense, that really sums up the life of the Christian, because the life of the Christian, there is an awful lot of that involved in talking about the Lord, and talking to the Lord, those things.

I think that that is very much a mark of the Christian. And it is a mark of the Christian very simply, because if you love somebody, you will never go through life not talking about that person.

Particularly, if somebody saved your life. If you imagine somebody who saved your life. You were drowning, maybe, or supposing you had fallen over the pier and you couldn't swim, and somebody saved your life.

[2 : 25] You would be forever indebted to that person. And if that person not only saved your life, but did great things for you, I think it's only fair to say that you would often talk about that person.

You might boast about that person. And that's what the Lord has done. He has saved our lives. And he has filled our lives with good things. And that is why we cannot but talk about him.

We cannot but tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the great example we have of, remember when Philip was telling Nathaniel about the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus was saying, I think this is something that we should always take on board regarding personal witness. When Philip was telling Nathaniel that he had found the Lord Jesus Christ.

And remember when Nathaniel was saying, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Remember what the response was of Philip. Philip says, okay, I've told you about it. Come and see.

[3 : 33] You come for yourself and find out. And that's what we should do. You know, we can tell people about the Lord. But you know, sometimes people have big problems about Christianity.

Maybe you're in here today and there's a part of you that is saying, you know, oh yeah, I would actually like to be a Christian, but I have big problems. And I know your problems may be sent around people.

Maybe they're sent around me, the minister. Maybe they're sent around the office bearer. Maybe they're sent around other Christians. That might be the case. But I would ask you to go beyond all that.

And discover for yourself this Jesus. Because you cannot make a true assessment about Christianity, what Christianity really is until you've come to meet the Lord Jesus.

That's where you'll make your assessment. That's where the truth really is. Prior to that, you cannot truly make an assessment of what it is to be a Christian.

[4 : 39] And that's a great example of what Philip left us in his dealing with Nathaniel. But maybe we're digressing slightly here. But this is the point where we're making is David cannot but talk about the Lord.

But he doesn't just talk about the Lord. He talks to the Lord. And again, that is natural for the Christian. And that is something that we do frequently. You know what the Bible says?

We're to pray without ceasing. And some people say, oh man, how do you do that? Do you mean to say that? There's no way that I can go down on my knees and spend my time.

But it means very simply that as we go through life, yes, there are times. Times we wrestle with the Lord. Times we draw aside and we're both in a secret place. There are times that we have to do business with the Lord.

And indeed every day we should make sure that we give time to being alone with the Lord. We have very full schedules.

[5 : 38] But you know, there should always be a slot in that day for being alone with the Lord. And you'll be quite persuaded of this. That the devil will do everything in his power to keep you away from that time.

Whatever time you have purpose in your heart or mind to give to the Lord, you can be sure that the devil will do all in his power to keep you away. He doesn't want you to be alone with the Lord. But throughout the day we spend so much of the day speaking to the Lord.

We ask him for help. It doesn't matter what age you are here. Maybe you're young. Maybe you're in school. Maybe you haven't even gone to school. You're never too young to speak to the Lord.

We ask the Lord for help. We ask him to find things. Just an instance yesterday I was searching for something that I had to find.

And I searched in all the places where what I was looking for should be. And it wasn't. And I was saying to the Lord, God, I have to get this.

[6 : 46] Please help me to find it. And I had forgotten about it. I had stopped looking. I thought, oh, I'll search again. I was just on my way upstairs when it came to my mind about this little box in the kitchen.

And I said, well, I'll go on. And there in the bottom of that box full of other things was what I was looking for. Now that's just a, I'm sure you can all give thousands of examples like that. But you see, this is what the Lord does.

That we speak to him. We ask him for little things just like that. It wasn't important to anybody else but it was to me. And the Lord is concerned about our day-to-day living. All these things were told in scripture and everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

Let your request be made known unto God. And that's what we're to do. We're to go to the Lord day in, day out, through the night. If you're afraid of things. If you're scared of people. If you're afraid of situations. If you've got yourself into a complex situation. If you're finding your work too much. In all these things.

[7 : 50] If your relationships with others have soured. Ask the Lord for help and for grace and the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. And all the time you're speaking to the Lord.

Interacting in these day-to-day things. So this is what David is doing. So we say he's not only speaking about the Lord but he's speaking to the Lord. Then he says, Yea, there I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Now, what do people think here that this expression, that walking through the valley of the shadow of death, is speaking about all the trials and difficulties and pains in life.

And while I'm sure it may include that, I think that it's speaking about exactly what it says. It's speaking here about death. The shadow of death and death itself.

And that's something that often we put away from ourselves. Because death is something that fills us with, it's got horrible, it's a very, a word that suggests to us lots of concepts that we don't like.

[9 : 00] There's pain and grief and sorrow, partings, bereavement, loneliness. Lots of things that we, it changes our lives radically.

Our lives are often never the same because of death. And death is a word that people often just push away. But it's an awesome thought that one day you and I are going to die.

I think that's one of the things about living in smaller communities like we do here rather than in the big city. It's that we're very, we're very aware of death.

Every day. Every day there are funerals. Every day there are people that you and I know that are dying. We see their notices, death notices, up in the shops. In the cities, it maybe tends to be more anonymous and you're out of the picture.

But here we're constantly confronted by death. And often as I, I myself are so often involved with death and looking upon death, it often goes through my own mind that one day it will be mine unless the Lord comes first.

[10 : 08] One day it will be my body that will be in a coffin. One day it will be my body that will be laid into the grave. And it will be the same for you, for all of us, unless the Lord comes first.

And it's a solemn and a sobering thought. But you know, one of the wonderful things about death, or the wonderful thing about death for the Christian is that the Christian will not go down into death's dark veil on their own.

No. Because the Lord, the shepherd, will be with them. The Christian is never, ever on his own. And maybe you're here today and you're saying, you're here yourself, even though you're a Christian, one of the things that fills me with fear is the thought of dying.

How will I cope in death? Will I fail in death? Will I bring dishonour upon the Lord in death? Will I be filled with fear?

Well, the thing is, we don't know how we'll be in death. But I think we should be praying, just as we pray for the grace to live, we should also be praying.

[11 : 13] We often hear people pray for that. praying for the grace to die. When the time comes that we will have the grace to die. Because the Lord will give us that. The shepherd is not going to abandon us.

Particularly in the greatest hour of need. No. He will be with us all the way. And it's lovely what the psalmist says. He says, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

It's not that I walk in the valley of the shadow of death. He walks through it. In other words, he goes into it and he comes out of it.

If he was just walking in it, you would say, well, that's going on and on and on. But it's not. It's only a temporary thing. He goes into it and he comes out. You know how we talk about light at the end of the tunnel.

But I think maybe this is something of what he's talking about. It's walking into the tunnel of death but there's light at the other end of it. Not so it is for the Christian.

[12 : 16] The awful thing for those who do not have the shepherd, they do not walk through the valley of the shadow of death. They walk in it. And they'll walk in it forever and ever and ever.

It's a fearful thought. But for those who have the shepherd, it is simply walking through it. And it must be a wonderful thing going into the valley of the shadow of death with the shepherd.

Because I believe that those who are going down into the valley of the shadow of death, that they will catch a glimpse of where they're going. That they won't be in a total darkness.

That there will be the mysteries of what is beyond will begin as it were to fill their soul. There's an extraordinary peace that is often I have seen amongst those who are dying in the Lord.

And I believe it is something of that glory of Emmanuel's land is already beginning to touch their soul. So it's going through.

[13 : 24] But we see here that it's a shadow, it says, the shadow of death. Now, you and I know that in order for there to be a shadow, there has to be light.

You can't have a shadow really without some light. And again, here is, I believe it is speaking to us of the Lord who is our light. The Lord's my light and saving health.

The Lord Jesus Christ who came into this world to be the light of this world. That even although death is there, the Lord is greater than death, larger than death. And his light is just causing death to be no more than really a shadow for you.

And you and I know the one thing about a shadow is a shadow. Spurgeon used to say the shadow of a dog can't bite. And that's true. I remember when you were younger and maybe you were out at night, a moonlight night and you were running through, maybe through woods.

And there were lots of woods in Plothee. I remember as a boy often being in them and sometimes in a really bright moonlight night all of a sudden it was like a monster.

[14 : 34] And you were, ah, but it was just a shadow. It was a shadow of maybe a tree or something the way it was. It couldn't hurt you. It gave you a fright. But it didn't hurt you. It couldn't hurt you.

And that's how death will be for the believer. It is but the shadow of death. And in a psalm it says, I will fear no evil.

No evil, no hurt, no harm. No evil can come, even evil personified in the form of the devil. Even he cannot hurt you because thou art with me.

Isn't that beautiful? I will fear no evil for thou art with me. The Lord is with us all the time. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. God is with us with his rod and staff.

Now you know the shepherd has his crook. The shepherd's crook and you have often great ornamentation. You have the long rods that were and then the horn or maybe a ram's horn and there's often great ornamentation.

[15 : 36] And that's how the shepherd uses that. He uses it in that two-fold way. Sometimes you'll see if you're supporting your time to drive the sheep in into say into a pen or into the to the to the to the fan.

and they're not moving. Sometimes he'll prod them or tap them on the back or push them on. And sometimes that's the way the Lord has to deal with us. Because sometimes we're slow to obey and slow to do.

And sometimes the Lord has to come and sometimes he has to bring the rod upon our back. And he will always measure the weight in which he will bring that rod upon our back because we're told because we are sons then that the Lord will discipline us as he will discipline his children.

And so this is all part of it. That the Lord will be there. Yes. But you know that sometimes the shepherd not only does the shepherd push on and drive on and maybe you know that sometimes you know when you want to get somebody's attention you sometimes prod somebody.

You know there's people in a crowd and you're trying to get somebody you just reach and you give them a poke in the back. I don't want to mean to be in any way irreverent but you know sometimes the Lord deals like that with us as well.

[16 : 58] When the Lord is wanting us to go somewhere or do something and we're reluctant to do it we don't want to do it. Sometimes the Lord begins to push us and prod us and press us and he wants to make life a little uncomfortable around us because we've settled down in a comfort zone.

And the Lord says no that's not where you're to be you have to do something else. That's not what I'm asking from you. And so sometimes the Lord is working at us like that pushing us on. But again as we know the shepherd uses his crook in order to draw to pull sometimes by the horns and sometimes just around the neck of the lamb you pull the lamb to you.

And again that's what the Lord does. With his rod sometimes even these times where you feel that the Lord is sore against you and you cannot understand his providence but you know he's pulled you right close to himself and you are in his tender embrace and sometimes you don't know it.

Sometimes the Lord is closer to you than you ever knew before. But then we'll move on and just just look at this in verse 5 thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil my cup runneth over. There are different ways of looking at this and I'm sure many of you have read the late Professor Douglas MacMillan's book The Lord O Shepherd.

[18 : 26] It is there is you will never ever find a greater commentary on this psalm than that book. It is in fact if you have never read it go and get it. It's a it's a wonderful wonderful book and in fact when you read that book you say how on earth can you preach on it but one of the things that struck me when Douglas MacMillan was talking here a lot of commentators leave they finish with the shepherd and they move on to another scene but Douglas was saying no not at all he said this is still all about the shepherd and it's about the sheep and he was saying that sometimes you know where you're feeding the sheep and on the ground and so on that it can get bad with bacteria and parasites and that's why troughs wooden troughs are put there so that you feed the sheep from these troughs and he was saying in the ancient world in the east that they used to build little tables as it were for the sheep in order that the sheep just at the level that their heads would be so that they could eat of it just so that they wouldn't be eating from where all these horrible infections where the bacteria and parasites were and in a sense that's what the

Lord is doing he's feeding us he's providing for us even while our enemies are all round about all these enemies that are trying to keep us back and destroy us and keep us away from the Lord and hinder us and hamper us and spoil things still despite everything the Lord has prepared a table in the presence of mine enemies and I don't know but it's a thought that's with me I don't know whether I'm right or wrong I'm talking in verse 6 about dwelling in the house of the Lord forever is it possible that even here although it's probably not as true a sense of the meaning that this could almost be the point of where the soul is leaving the body the soul that has gone out from the body into the spiritual world and for the first time ever is seen into the spiritual realm and as the soul is transported into glory enjoying in that transportation the fullness of the Lord's presence and experiencing a glory that has never that never knew of before that seeing into the spirit world seeing the enemies the spiritual enemies that are there those fearful enemies

Satan and the region of angels that have been seeking to destroy your life that maybe you'll catch a glimpse of them as you have been brought into the presence of the king and there is that table furnished and maybe you will see something of what is outside and you holly safe within maybe if you even think of the story of the that Jesus told to the rich man and Lazarus that there is something of that in here and thou anointest my head with oil we know that the shepherd has to put oil put things upon the head the horns even of the animals and here we have this picture of the oil of the Holy Spirit where the Holy Spirit anoints us so that our cup runs over and that's the beauty of the Christian life you see the Lord doesn't give meagerly he's not a miser no my friend he is a liberal giver and if you're here today and you say to yourself you know

I'm getting very little out of my Christian life you know the one person that you cannot blame is the Lord if your Christian life is kind of bankrupt at the moment and you're saying you say you know it's not like it used to be well that is not we can never lay any charge against the Lord we must look at our shelves because the Lord has given wonderful and glorious promises he has promised wonderful things to us about filling our soul and of wine and the leaves well refined and feast of fat things the promises are there but far too often our lives are such and we live our lives in such a way that we cannot enjoy the communion the fellowship the nearness of the Lord that we could if we were more dedicated more committed more seeking him than we are but the point here is that the Lord gives liberally and he pours down and this is the wonderful thing that even in the presence of enemies that he is able to cause our cup to run over now I spoke about that even in the soul maybe I'm wrong but thinking about the soul being taken away from the presence of the enemies away into glory but that is true in this world you think just take for instance

Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail there they were in the presence of enemies they had been beaten their backs were open and saw blood probably still pouring down and their feet were fast in their stocks what were they doing they were singing their heads off praising God why because they were so full of the joy of the Lord for them their cup was running over and I'm sure that many of you have experienced that as well periods in your life when you ought to have been yes you were hurting periods in your life when things were difficult and yet there was a joy in your heart and you were saying you know this shouldn't be but it was why because the Lord in the presence of the pains and sorrows and difficulties in life was filling your soul the joy of the Lord is your strength and then just in a word it says surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever goodness and mercy again that has been likened to the if you're following on with a shepherd and a sheep here are the two sheepdog goodness and mercy that's their names their lovely names but you know if I was to be offered to fame take your choice what do you want fame fortune wealth power honour or to have goodness and mercy following you all the days of your life there's only one winner it would be goodness and mercy what would anything else in this world be worth if we didn't have

[25 : 41] God's goodness and God's mercy following us all the days of our life I'm sure that's what you want it's certainly what I want and that's you know it's wonderful the assurance because this is the shepherd's psalm David says surely goodness and mercy it's not I hope it's not I would love to have but it's going to be that's what it's going to be my dear friends that's what it's going to be for you that's what it is for you if you're in Christ if you're without Jesus today think of this psalm and the riches that are in it and you're going to have to say to yourself I can't apply any of that to myself it's not terrible doesn't that leave you kind of empty and lonely oh my dear friend

Jesus the shepherd is here today and he's saying to you this can be all yours all the blessing of this psalm can be yours just now won't you ask him to be your shepherd won't you ask him to be the shepherd of your life because you don't really know how to direct your own life I don't times I try what mistakes I make but you know when we have the Lord he will direct us and let us remember then it says I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever that's where we're going if we're in Christ we're going to be in God's house forever it's not lovely heading home you see we're on a journey one of the things when you're on a journey you don't put down permanent residence you don't you don't say well this is it forever no we're just passing through going home you know it's a lovely thing it doesn't matter where you are when you're away on holiday holidays are great but you know you know when you get home don't you always say it's good to get home it's good to be home when you get to your own bed you say ah there's nothing like it no bed like it there's nowhere like home and you know for the Christian as they go through this world they become increasingly aware that this world is not their home and you know when you pass through the valley of the shadow of death and you're taken to glory you will say

I'm home wouldn't that be lovely is that where you're going today are you going home or is this something that sadly is not part of your life well please please make it a part of your life by seeking Jesus the great shepherd here and now let us pray oh lord we thank thee again for thy word we thank thee for thy patience with us we thank thee for the many blessings that are provided in thy word we thank thee for the faithfulness of the lord to his word and we know that thy word is true help us to live upon that word more and more to depend upon it every day we thank thee for thy goodness and for thy mercy oh to have that goodness and mercy following us all the days of our life may we know it in our own soul bless each one of us here bless our homes our families our loved ones do us good and take away from us our every sin for Jesus sake we ask it amen