

Psalm 23:4-5

by Carl Armerding

Carl Armerding's sermon on Psalm 23:4-5 emphasizes God's comforting presence in life's darkest moments and the importance of living for His glory.

Duration: 50:15

Scripture: Psalm 23:1-3, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28, John 10:11-14, Romans 3:3-4, James 5:19-20

Topics: "Protection"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the impact of sin and death on humanity, tracing it back to the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible. He emphasizes that the valley of the shadow of death is not just a physical place or a moment in one's life, but a state that all humans enter into from birth. The speaker encourages his audience to live up to their heritage and let the honor and glory of Jesus Christ guide their actions and thoughts. He also mentions the importance of the soul and how God restores it in various ways, referencing the book of James. The sermon concludes with an invitation to find rest in Jesus for those who are weary and burdened.

Transcript

My Kingdom, give us this day our daily bread. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Jesus, Jesus, Lord, we pray.

...have joined us since you may not be aware of the fact that we're studying in Psalm 23 in these morning hours. And we're turning again to that Psalm this morning, Psalm 23. So far we have considered verses 1, 2, and 3. This morning we hope to look at verses 4 and 5. And the Lord willing, the last verse on Friday morning.

The first thing we did last Lord's Day when we began our study of this Psalm was to look at the shepherd himself. The Lord is my shepherd. And for that we went to the 10th chapter of John, where the Lord himself claims to be exactly that.

And we saw the various proof that he gives, that he is a good shepherd. And then we also noted how, as we move along in the Psalm, that this results in perfect satisfaction. Where he says, I shall not want.

And then we're introduced to a very lovely scene in verses 2 and 3. Where we have the green pastures and the still waters, or the waters of quietness. And we pointed out that it's not so much a question of

eating and drinking there, as it is to enjoy the atmosphere of that wonderful provision that the Lord has made for us. This we believe fits right in with what we have in the New Testament, where the Lord invites us to come and rest.

Come unto me all ye that labor, and the heavy laden and I will give you rest. So we stressed the quiet time in connection with that second verse. And then we pointed out too how he restores our soul.

And for the illustration or at least the application of that, we went to the closing verses of James official. To see the number of different ways in which the Lord restores our soul. It's interesting to observe that we're living in a day when great emphasis is being placed upon the soul of man.

This is indicated by the number of words that begin with the syllable psych. Like psychology, psychosomatic, psychiatry, and so on. Psych is simply the Greek word for soul.

And we find that the number of words beginning with that syllable have greatly multiplied in the years just closing. So that men are beginning to realize that there's something that needs attention besides the body. And how wonderful that the scriptures give us this very thing.

Then in the close of verse three, we have the Lord leading us in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. And we pointed out that the reason why the word is in the plural here, the paths of righteousness, is perhaps to cover every activity in which we might engage as human beings. Our home life, our school life, our business life, our social life, whatever it might be, come under the heading of the paths of righteousness.

Unless you should think that this is a sort of an austere experience, let me just remind you that in the book of Proverbs, we read that the path of the just is of the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Yes, the path of the just one. The word is in the singular number in the original language, but that's the one whom we follow.

And the perfect day, by the way, is not sunset. The perfect day is high noon. When we lived in San Diego, California some years ago, there was a lady living just east there, Carrie Jacobs Bond, who wrote that lovely lyric, when you come to the end of a perfect day.

When I got to considering that, I said to myself, the perfect day has no end. It's always high noon. And it's the brightness of the full noonday sun that shines upon one in the perfect day.

And this is the kind of experience we have as we follow the Lord Jesus in the paths of righteousness. And you notice it says here, and this is an interesting qualification, for His namesake. And I like the way this is put in the Spanish language.

I think that every one of us who have had the privilege of learning more than one language ought to take advantage of the variations that we get in these various languages. I think I pointed out one yesterday in John 3, 16 in the French, that it not only says His only begotten Son, but Son Fils Unique. That's His unique Son.

God has given to us His unique Son. Here again is a very interesting observation in connection with this verse in the Spanish language. Instead of reading for His namesake, the Spaniard says, Por el amor de su nombre, it's for the love of His name.

For the love of His name. And I enjoy these variations as I read the scriptures in the various languages. And any of you who have had the privilege of being born in a bilingual home, as I did, should take advantage of this because it takes all of these languages to give us the real fullness of meaning that we find in these terms.

And then just to consider this, for the love of His name. Beloved, that ought to settle every question as to where I can go and what I can do. Can I do this for His namesake? Years ago, my dear father brought that to my attention.

There are no specific commandments to tell you about certain things that you can't do. For instance, in those boyhood days when, like every boy, I suppose, there was the temptation to smoke that first cigarette. And there was the first dance to go to and all that sort of thing.

And of course, I didn't know every scripture which says I shall not smoke cigarettes. It wasn't there. And there wasn't anyone that said that I shouldn't go to a social dance.

But my father pointed out that the way to answer those questions was to ask this one. Would it honor His name? Would it glorify Him if I do this? And so this is the way we settle a lot of these questions. If you want a direct text of scripture for everything, well, of course, then you can almost make a book to suit yourself.

But not so when you don't need it. When you walk in the path of righteousness for His namesake. Oh, beloved, let's remember this.

When we are tempted to engage in certain things in our everyday life, will this really glorify the Lord? Will this bring honor to His name? I remember when I first went to the mission field as a young man of 20. My father took me to the steamship in New York. He was setting sail for Central America.

And Dad looked at me and he said, Son, I'm sorry I haven't got the sum of money that I could give you to relieve you of all financial anxiety, at least for the next year you're going into this new field. But he said, Son, by God's grace, I've given you a good name. Live up to it.

And my father had given me a good name. He had a reputation for honesty and integrity in the community in which we lived. And I've been able to use this with my own children and said, Now look, your grandfather has left you a great heritage.

Live up to it. And how much greater is the heritage, beloved, for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as a Savior, to let the honor and glory of His name determine where we go, what we do, what we say, yes, and even what we think. All of these things could come in to these paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Now so much by way of introduction. I remember an old Presbyterian pastor we had, one of the lad of twelve. He always labeled the origins of his sermon.

This is a part of his introduction. And then, of course, he preached his sermon, and now a few words by way of application. And finally, by way of conclusion, we were always ready to conclude with him.

But he's very nicely divided. But now let's take a look at verse four in our psalm. You notice that there's quite a change of atmosphere here.

Yea, though I walk to the valley of the shadow of death. You know, very often this is limited in people's thinking to some serious experience that they have, or the closing hours of their lives, as though this is the only time it applies. And they get a rather shock when you point out to them that they've been in this valley ever since they were born.

You came into the valley of the shadow of death when you were born. And this leads me to make this remark, that these places which are mentioned in the psalm are not stations along the road that you leave behind, like the green pastures and the still waters. Yes, I enjoyed them, but let's move on to the next station, the paths of righteousness.

Let's move on to the next station, and you come into the valley of the shadow. In some mysterious way, all of these things, shall I say, run concurrently. It's possible that even though we are in the valley of the shadow of death, to enjoy the green pastures and the waters of quietness, yes, because it's His presence that makes it just that, you see.

But let us look at this expression, the valley of the shadow of death. One commentator has pointed out to us that the word in the original, translated the shadow of death, is one of the gloomiest, darkest that you can possibly imagine. And you ask yourself, how in the world did it ever get this way? I remember this as a question I used to ask myself when men and women were dying in the neighborhood where I was born and brought up.

Death was such a mysterious thing to me. I remember going with my mother to view the corpse of a policeman who had endeared himself to all of us boys and girls in the neighborhood where we lived. Everybody knew Mr. Waters.

It's true he wore a club at his side, but he never used it on any of us. He was the kind of a man that could keep order without a club. And then one day Mr. Waters died.

And Mother, of course, had to go and comfort Mrs. Waters. And I went with her. And I was mystified.

I came home, I said to my mother, I said, How did all of this start? And she had a ready answer from the word of God. Because the answer is found in the fifth chapter of Romans. By one man.

Oh, how much damage one man can do. By one man. Sin entered into the world and death by sin.

And so death hath passed upon or passed through to all men. You see where the blame lies. By one man.

And so the shadow comes in. There it is in the shadowing, you and me right now. We're in it.

The valley of the shadow of death. What a contrast to the green pastures and the waters of quietness. But here it is.

And one has only to pick up his daily newspaper to look over the obituary column. If you needed no further proof, that would be it, wouldn't it? And so far as I know, every community of any size that I've ever lived in has had its cemetery. There it is.

You're reminded of it. And then, of course, when it enters the circle of your own family, as it has my own on more than one occasion, you're made very much aware of this, that you're living in the valley of the shadow of death. Thank God for what follows here.

You know, sometimes we think these Old Testament saints lived in a sort of an obscure dispensation. But not so was the psalmist when he said, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil. Why, the one who was just my leader leading beside the still waters, and leading me in the path of righteousness, now, as it were, just steps back a step or two.

And instead of becoming my leader, he becomes my companion. Thou art with me. Oh, this is wonderful, isn't it? To think that the one who just now was in the forefront is now at my side.

The one who was in the vanguard now becomes my bodyguard. This is tremendous, isn't it? And this is what enables us Christians to face that which people look upon as the king of terror. As something entirely different.

You say, yes, but why should it make so much difference to have him with you? Ah, because he'd been through the thing. He went right through the thing. And he faced it in all its grim reality.

As we were pointing out last evening, when he faced it there in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, If it be possible, let this cup pass. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done. And I like sometimes to just point out to people that what the Lord Jesus faced there was not simply what we call natural, ordinary death.

He died a cruel death. The cross of Christ. A cruel death.

The prince of darkness was there in all of his power. And when you see the word darkness in the scriptures, it implies not only the absence of light, but positive opposition to the light. When the scripture says light is coming to the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Darkness, I repeat, friends, is something more than the absence of light. That, after all, is a negative definition, isn't it? The absence of light. It's positive opposition to it.

And that's why one of the names we give to Satan is the prince of darkness. And your Lord and mine went into it in its terrible depths. When on the cross of Christ, not only was there physical darkness, when for three long hours he hung upon that cross, and the sun refused to shine.

But, oh, friends, that was only symbolic of the terrible darkness into which the Lord Jesus went for you and for me. How well did the poet put it. None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters of the cross, how dark was the night that the Lord went through ere he found his sheep.

The horror of it. We get some idea of this perhaps in the 18th Psalm. Would you mind turning back a page or two in your Bible to Psalm 18? And look at this.

While I grant you that primarily this was the psalmist's own experience, as the title of this psalm tells us, but I'm sure that he's speaking here prophetically for the Lord Jesus. And he says here in verse 4, Psalm 18, verse 4, The sorrows of death encompassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell or Sheol encompassed me about, the snares of death prevented me.

You read this psalm and you get some idea of what the Lord Jesus really endured upon the cross of Calvary. All the forces of darkness, satanic, Satan with all of his hosts was there. And that is why he can be such a wonderfully comforting companion in that which otherwise frightens people.

You know, as one who has faced death more than once in his lifetime, and I have, and doubtless some of the rest of you have also, and when I say faced death, I'm not simply talking about a sick bed, because on

the mission field, together with another missionary who is now in glory, we faced a hostile mob. We made the great mistake of going to their town in what they called Holy Week. And mind you, it is an awful sin to preach the gospel on Holy Week, in this particular town.

But we had the audacity to do it. And as a result we were pelted with everything imaginable. Sticks, stones, human waste, what have you.

Yes, they just pelted us. I managed to dodge a few of the stones as they came our way. Caught one of them just before it hit my companion.

And after about twenty minutes of that, they suddenly stopped as if someone had ordered them to quit. And we moved on to our apartment where we were having our lodgings. And they took revenge on us there by pelting the roof, the tile roof with stones, until the next morning we could look up and the whole roof was full of holes.

Well, some thirty years later, I was back in that same community and preaching the gospel, and I noticed a man in the audience whose eyes fairly bore through me. I like eye contact. But I didn't appreciate it that day.

There was a bouquet before me on the table. I kept dodging it to get away from his eye, but I couldn't. And after the meeting he was the first man to come up.

And he said to me, Were you in Colinas de Santa Barbara, that was the name of the town, thirty years ago, the year 1915? I said yes. He said, Do you remember being stoned there? I said, I could never forget it. He said, Well, I was one of those that stoned you.

And the way he said it, I thought he'd come to finish the job. I looked at him for a moment wondering. He said, Some time later you came into another town, Santa Cruz de Yacoa, and he said you preached there that night.

He said, I well remember the text on which you preached. And I went thirty years, you know, you have to forget what you did thirty years before, but this man hadn't. I said, Well, what did I preach on? He said, You preached on the third and fourth chapters of Romans.

I thought for a moment, yes, I did. He said, Brother, as you continued to preach, God was speaking to me. And as a result of that sermon, I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

I've been waiting thirty years to tell you. Well, you know, I know it's only for ladies to embrace each other, but we men did. As a matter of fact, this is quite common in Central America.

We have what we call an abrazo. And we find the same is true in Spain today with our dear brethren in Spain. And don't get me started on Spain, because things are really happening in Spain these days.

The Lord is really blessing the work. New assemblies are being established. I can remember when it was impossible to preach there with the doors open in Spain.

But today, thank God, these doors are open. And we're able to preach, yes. We thank God that we can now embrace each other in the face as we did that day of brethren in Christ.

But coming back to my subject, I said to this brother, I said, Brother, I said, when you were stoning us, I said, what did we look like? I said, tell me, what sort of impression did you get? Well, he said, it just seemed like you didn't care. He said, you stood there as if, well, this is part of it. And we didn't seem to make an impression on you.

Well, he didn't know just how our hearts were fluttering at the time. But the Lord evidently gave us the grace to show these people a calm in the face of imminent danger. And he said it impressed us.

He said, after you and your companion drove away that day, we were impressed with the calm and poise that you had. To me, dear friends, this is a perfect illustration of what we have in this psalm, I will fear no evil. Oh, beloved, if that time comes, if the Lord tarries a while yet, and you and I, perhaps some of us who are older, we have to go through what some of the theologians call the article of death, I hope we can go through it just that way.

My dear father was an example to me in this. The Wednesday night before he died, in Winslow, Arizona, he said to my sister, who now lives in the Claremont home in California, he said, Ben, I don't understand it. Why doesn't the Lord call me? Well, she said, Dad, you can't barge in there any more time you'd like.

You've just got to wait your time. And the next Lord's Day morning, it came. It was five o'clock, and in he went.

As you know, Dad never showed one moment of fear. Not one moment. To him, it was going to be a joyous entering in to the presence of the Lord.

And in addition to the wonderful experience of seeing the Lord Jesus for the first time, there will be the joy of reunion with those of our loved ones that have gone on before. Oh, beloved, thank God for this passage of Scripture. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou.

You notice instead of talking about the shepherd, he's now talking to him. Thou art with me. And thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Now, this word translated rod here, is translated scepter in Psalm 45. The scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter. It's the symbol of authority.

Royal authority, it is. Thy rod. Thy royal authority.

And notice, friends, that when he died, that was actually emphasized even by his enemies. I was reading through the 15th chapter of Luke one day, with this in mind, and I was surprised to find out that in that 15th chapter of Mark, I should say, not Luke, 15th chapter of Mark, you have at least six references to the royalty of the Lord Jesus. The king of the Jews? They wanted it changed.

They said, right, not the king of the Jews, but they just said, I'm the king of the Jews. Pilate says, what I've written, I've written. Thank God for that.

There he is. And as the king, the scripture tells us in the second chapter of the epistles of the Hebrews, that inasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same. And notice the reason why.

That through death, he might destroy or annul him that had the power of death, that is the devil. This is an arresting statement, isn't it? That the devil is said to have the power of death. Now, we have at least three

different words for power in the original language of the New Testament.

One of them simply means authority. That's not the word used in Hebrews. Another one is found in Romans 1.16 where the gospel of Christ is the power of God.

And there is the Greek word upon which we found our English word dynamite. That's not the word used in Hebrews 2. The word used in Hebrews 2 is the word kratos, which we use in combinations in such words as democrat, plutocrat, aristocrat. It speaks of might, which could be exercised apart from authority altogether.

And this is the sense in which the devil is said to have the power or might of death, like a villain or like a bandit who holds you up at the point of a pistol, puts it in your side, he says, this is a stick-up. Yes, he's got the might of death. He's got the power of death, but he hasn't got the authority.

And when the Lord Jesus Christ died, he annulled him that had the power of death, that is the devil. For what purpose? That he might deliver us who through fear of death were all our lifetime subject to bondage. This is it.

You know, this is what makes the deathbed of a Christian so different, doesn't it? People say, how come? Here's a man facing the inevitable, as they say, and yet he does so with a look of joy and peace on his face. Why, he's going home. And who's afraid to go home? I'm not.

As long as we're absent from the Lord, we're at home in the body, we're absent from him. But when we're absent from the body, we're at home with the Lord. Who's afraid to go home? And all of this seems to be locked up in this verse, you see.

I'll fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod or thy scepter, and thy staff, the staff speaking of that which supports. Yes, we need his support. And we never need it more, perhaps, than when people are looking on just to see how a Christian dies.

And I've had that experience more than once. I can testify, dear friends, that I have an answer for every atheist that I've ever met. You can't duplicate the deathbed of a Christian who knows the Lord is with him.

And then this leads on, as we have in the next verse here, to a prepared table. This is interesting, isn't it? That immediately in connection with this reference to death, we should have a table mentioned. How suggestive, isn't it, of the way in which the Lord Jesus connected these two things together.

Because in what we call the Lord's table, what the Scripture calls the Lord's table, we have the remembrance of his death. And here we find these two things brought together in this connection, the valley of the shadow of death and the table of communion. You see, earlier in the psalm, we had provision made for our hunger and our thirst.

But this is different. And I point this out to any who may have never noticed it, that the Lord has something else in view for you besides satisfying the pangs of hunger. I have frequently said, and I'll repeat it this morning, that I believe the primary purpose of eating is not merely to sustain the body or to satisfy the pangs of hunger.

The primary purpose of eating is fellowship. That's why Eve, after she took the forbidden fruit, she didn't sit down and eat it alone. She gave to her husband with her.

It was a natural thing to do. Because this was the way things started. This was to be a time of fellowship.

This is why, dear friends, we enjoy sitting down and eating with each other. And this is brought up to its highest point when we come to what the Scripture calls the Lord's table. And He Himself has prepared it.

How wonderful, isn't it? Thou prepares the table before me, and notice that this is not heaven. It's in the presence of my enemies. Yes, they are all around us.

And we're never more aware of it, perhaps, than when we're preparing for this. To be able to concentrate the mind on this particular thing. As a lad, I was deeply impressed.

In the Presbyterian church, which we attended at the time, I was a boy about ten. And then this Friday night before the communion Sunday, which was observed about once a quarter in that church, on the Friday night before, they had what was known as a preparatory service. I learned afterward that in the old country, those who attended that service were given a coin, which they presented on the following Lord's Day, which entitled them to participate in the Lord's Supper, because they had been at the preparatory service the Friday night before.

Getting ready for this communion with the Lord Himself. Yes, in the presence of our enemies, because there's so many things come in to hinder your communion and mine, don't they? There's the cares of the week that we've just about finished, and then there's the cares of the week ahead of us. In a business world such as we live in now, oh, how many distractions there are.

Yes, we have all sorts of things continuing against us when we try to get ready for the remembrance of our Lord. But thank God, He's able to silence them all and give to us that lovely communion, fellowship with Himself. And communion simply means having something in common with somebody else.

And you know the mystery of it is this, that the Apostle could say as he does in 1 Corinthians, the first chapter, God is faithful who hath called us into the fellowship, into the communion of Jesus Christ, His Son. God asking us to participate with Him in that which He enjoys. That's what communion is.

It's enjoying what God enjoys. This is tremendous, to think that you and I should have the privilege of enjoying what God enjoys. That's what real fellowship is.

This is what this prepared table is all about. It prepares the table before me in the presence of my enemies. And then in connection with this, we have this lovely thought of having our heads anointed with oil.

A fresh anointing of the Spirit of God. You know, some of us are quite satisfied with the fact that we've been baptized with the Holy Spirit when we were baptized into the body of Christ, as we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. But you know, St. Paul also speaks of the supply of the Spirit in Philippians chapter 1. And I believe there is such a thing as a renewal in this way.

And how this does renew us when we come together in this way to remember Him, together with our fellow saints at His table, to have the head anointed with oil. Somebody says, yes, the head needs it. Because that's where a lot of our troubles begin.

But I think, dear friends, it's not only that. Because from the head it can flow down to even down to our feet. As we learn from another one of the Psalms, it flows down.

The precious ointment. It goes down even to the skirt of the garment. Beloved, let us covet that this might be our experience any and every time that we come together to remember Him.

And then, just this last thought here. And this, of course, is so subjective. My cup run is over.

Your cup, after all, might not be a very big one. But, thank God, it has been one's experience again and again to find that a meeting such as this really results in this wonderful experience that our cup runneth over. And what do you do with an overflowing cup? Well, you share it with somebody else.

This, I believe, should be one of the things that comes out of our morning meetings as we remember our blessed Lord and His death. The cup should be overflowing. Sometimes young people come to us and say, Would you mind giving me a few little ideas as to how to go about witnessing for the Lord? Just get your heart so full of Him that you can't contain Him.

It will come out. Yes, indeed. I remember the night after I was baptized, I was on my way back to the job, to work.

My father was superintendent of the shop and I was working upstairs in the office. I was wondering just how I was going to handle this situation because I felt I should be saying something about it. But the enemy had me persuaded that I was such a weak, vacillating individual that I better not say anything about it.

Just keep it to yourself. But you know, the first man I met was a man under whom I worked, a Virginian by the name of Thomas Evans. And the first thing he said to me, he said, Well, kid, I'll get on with a small one.

I said, Mr. Evans, I was baptized last night. I almost choked on my own words. I wasn't going to say a thing about it.

But my cup was running over. It was running over. So I had an opportunity to witness to my boss.

And that night when the big boss came out, who was an atheist, by the way, chomping a big cigar with his hat back on the back of his head, I said, Well, Evans, anything new today? He said, Yes, Mr. Evans, the kid here rode the goat last night. He was referring to what they do in some of the lodges. But again, it was my privilege standing there face to face with the big boss, the president of the concern.

He said, You're rather young to be riding the goat. I said, Mr. Wood, I was baptized last night in the name of the Father and the Son. You can imagine how this 15-year-old boy went out of that office that night, thrilled with the thought that he had made my cup run over.

Friends, this is the way it ought to be. You shouldn't have to pump this out. It should just flow over, you know, just of itself.

This is one of the wonderful things of living in such close fellowship with the Lord that you can say, Thou art with me. In closing, let us turn to hymn number 202. Hymn number 202.

What a fellowship. What a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms. What a blessedness.

What a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms. Number two. Let us rise to sing.

Will Jesus come?

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