

Even In Deep Darkness ■ The Lord Comforts Me

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the presence and comfort of God even in the midst of sin and darkness. Using Psalms 23, the speaker highlights the assurance of God's compassion and protection, especially when facing trials or spiritual darkness. The message encourages believers to trust in God's steadfast love and authority, even in times of discipline or fear, knowing that His grace and mercy will never depart from them.

Scripture: Psalms 23:4, Psalms 107:13, 2 Samuel 7:14, Psalms 40:11, Job 10:21, Matthew 4:16, Psalms 3:6

Topics: "God's Comfort in Darkness", "Trusting God's Compassion"

Description

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Transcript

So turn to Psalm 23. This is going to be my fifth message from the psalm. Now sitting back there in the first hour, hearing Jeff holding my son watching the TV back there, and right under the TV there was a picture.

I just briefly borrowed the picture. I will put it back after the service. Look at it.

It's not Psalm 23. Look at this verse. It says something very similar to what we're going to look at today.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Conjunction, he's going to explain why not to be.

The Lord your God will be with you. And then what's this word here say? Wherever you go. And I hope by the end of my message, you're going to think of something else when you hear that word wherever.

Something that might not come to your mind initially when you read Psalm 23. And even if you just asked yourself, what do I fear the most as a Christian of a situation I could be in where the Lord's not there? If I made a list of the places I'd be most terrified to not have the presence of God with me, what would be the

top thing on the list? Death, a serious trial, a death of a loved one, or even something else that I'm going to hold my tongue and I'm not going to state it right now. But you will see shortly, Lord willing.

All right. Psalm 23, Psalm 23, we're looking at verse four. David writes, even though, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, or as your ESV rightly puts in the footnote of deep darkness, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

How is he with us? Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil.

My cup overflows. Surely, only goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Father, I thank you, Lord, all the truth that we've already heard today, Lord, about having peace with you, a legal, a legal peace of being justified in your courtroom. And Lord, we've even heard in the Lord's Supper of your prayers for us, Lord, that, Lord, what a picture of your absolute concern for us. Lord, we see that in John 17.

We see it right here in Psalm 23. Lord, you're very occupied with us, your flock. And obviously, Lord, it should be a no-brainer to us because you sent your son and you shed his blood to even bring us into the flock and to save us.

And Lord, we have that great privilege here today to be able to say with David, the Lord is my shepherd. And Father, our heart's desire is those who can't say the my, they can't own you as their own. Lord, our heart's desire is that they would own you, Lord, that they could say the Lord is my personal shepherd.

I'm in his flock. I've trusted in Christ. I've turned from sin, unrighteousness, and I'm following Him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And Lord, I pray that you would comfort those today who have fears in their lives, Lord, very easily. Some of what I share right now could go in one ear and out the other. But Lord, you've sent the Spirit and you're able through your Spirit to drive home truth and make it alive.

And so I pray that you'd even do that even now. And so, Father, I commit this time to you. Lord, help me in the midst of all my weakness.

Help me to articulate and say what needs to be said in Christ's name. Amen. Well, in the previous messages, I've sought to show you from Psalm 23 that the Lord, number one, He's actively right now in your life providing for you.

So you should be able to say, along with I, that I shall not want. The Lord is meeting my spiritual needs. He's meeting even things I think I need now.

I don't really need now. I can trust Him. The Lord really cares.

Secondly, we've seen that the Lord is actively reviving you. And maybe you've experienced that since I did that sermon. Maybe something's happened in your life.

You've had some reviving take place. Does this sound good, Ken? Okay. And God's brought some restoration back to you in your inner man.

Praise the Lord for that. And so no matter what you're facing, you can't say, I'm hopeless. I'm hopeless.

There's no hope for me. No, that's a thought of unbelief. And then the third thing I've showed you is the Lord is actively leading you, right? And I hope you've seen His leadership in your life.

And again, what is the purpose behind His leading you and I? What have I tried to emphasize? It's for His namesake, right? God is committed to God, and God is committed to His glory and His name being honored. And there are certain places He might lead you that you don't think is a good place for you to go. But instead, you should be looking at that circumstance and asking, Lord, how can I honor You and bring glory to Your name in the midst of my present trial? That should be our mindset.

And then today, right now, we're going to consider something here, a fourth thing, and that is that the Lord is actively protecting you and protecting me. And I get that in verse 4. The Lord is protecting us. I will fear no evil.

And then He explains why. For you are with me. So we shouldn't be able to say, I'm going to experience something in this life by which there is absolutely, if I'm a Christian, let me qualify that, right? For you, believer, you should be able to say, I shall not want and see God's provision.

You should be able to say, He restores my soul and see His constant reviving of you. You should be able to say, He leads me and see the way He's leading your life for His glory. And you should be able to say, you know what? There's a lot I could be afraid of.

There's a lot I could be terrified of. There's a lot that could bring doubts into my mind. But we just heard in John 17 that He's praying for us.

And we've just read right here in Psalm 23, He's with us. And we just saw in that picture right there, Joshua 1, He's with us wherever we go. So where is a place that I could go that the Lord is not there with me? And we hear that.

But brethren, some of you, you've had to experience the reality of trying to believe this experientially in a tough, difficult trial and situation in your life. And ultimately, all of us, to some degree, are going to have to live out the truth we've heard from this pulpit at different points in our life. And so this Psalm right here, verse 4, what's one thing it implies is going to happen in our lives.

We're going to be tested, right? We're going to face tests. And in the midst of the test, what do we need to do? I will fear no evil for you are with me. We've got to believe that the Lord is with you.

This is something you've got to own by faith, not by sight, not by feelings. We've got to believe this, that He is going to protect us in such a way that I don't have to be afraid. And the contrast to being afraid, I can be what? In the midst of this deep darkness, what does He say? You can experience.

That rod and that staff, they comfort me. They reassure me. All right? So you've got fear, or you've got reassurance and comfort.

Or you're somewhere in the middle. You're wrestling between the two, and whatever it is you're going through. And remember, this Psalm here, it's metaphoric, symbolic, illustrative.

This is figurative language. And we're the sheep in this analogy. The Lord is our shepherd.

And so in order to rightly understand Psalm 23, and I have found this far more difficult with this verse than any other verse in this Psalm, to try to really look through Scripture and define the valley of the shadow of death, and to define the rod and the staff from the Bible. Right? I can't just run to a shepherd out there and say, hey, what do you use these tools for? How does it bring comfort to the sheep? We really want to be bound to try to look at these things scripturally. And understand, okay, if this is what it's actually used for an actual sheep, then in the metaphor, the Lord using that towards me, what's that look like? All right? Because if he says I'm comforted by his rod and his staff, well, I don't get any comfort if I don't know what the tools are doing.

And trust me, there are many, many ways to interpret the rod and the staff. There's many ways even to look at the valley of the shadow of death. And this Psalm, you know what, verse four, it's constantly read at a funeral when you're facing a physical death.

Is that really the primary application? Is that really the primary thing here? We're going to consider some of these things. So, now, I've just mentioned there's some difficulties with what is this deep darkness, the shadow, what is the rod and the staff. But I want to first consider something that's very clear here that I don't think could be misunderstood necessarily.

And that's this phrase, I will fear no evil for you're with me. All right? So, we're going to hop in and consider that first. And then we're going to think about this valley of the shadow of death, this rod and the staff that bring comfort.

But let's think about I will fear no evil. So, what is fear? What is fear? Are you afraid right now in your life? Are you afraid? What are you afraid of? Yeah, it's rooted in unbelief. We've got to think about what's at the root of something.

You don't just think about fear. But what leads to fear is a doubting of God, right? A doubting that He is with me. Fear.

It's, you know, to be seized with alarm. What's the alarm about? I might get injured. Someone might harm me.

Someone might harm someone that I love. All right? So, there's this sense of fear that gets over the person and it grips them. And then this can lead to anxiety.

Right? There's this anxiousness about my circumstances. Until the possibility for danger is gone from my physical eyes, I'm going to be anxious and fearful. Right? That's often how people respond.

Can fear, does fear lead to all sorts of sin? Is there any text that speaks about fear? I mean, if fear is rooted in unbelief and not trusting the Lord, obviously it leads to all sorts of sin. But listen to Psalm 37, 8. Fret not yourselves. Why? Why should I not be fretting and anxious and fearful? Fret not yourself, it only tends.

What's it tend to? Evil. Fret not yourselves, it only tends to evil. I mean, don't you see that in your life? When you're afraid and you give in to the fear, it tends to evil.

Right? It tends to anxiety. It tends you to act in a harsh, unloving way towards those around you in the midst of your trying circumstances. Okay, so that's some of what is fear.

Why are you afraid and anxious? Rick already hit on it. Unbelief. Where would be a place I could go to prove that to you, that fear is rooted in unbelief? You don't need to turn there, but listen to Jesus's words, right? Jesus is, that's a great place to go to define it.

In Matthew 8, Behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves. But Jesus was, what was Jesus doing in the midst of the storm? Asleep. And they went, they woke him, saying, Save us, Lord, we're perishing.

What did Jesus say to them? Why are you afraid? Why are you afraid? And then he diagnoses the problem. What does he say? Why are you afraid? And this is your issue of why you're afraid. What did he give? O, you of little faith.

All right, a lot of faith. Faith is taking God at His word. Faith is believing the Lord.

It's a trust, not in our feelings, but in the truth of what God has said and His word and His promises. We're placing our faith and our hope in what He has said, what He has written, just like Christ and the temptations that He faced. He's going to the Word of God in the midst of those temptations.

So here you're in the midst of this great storm with Jesus, bodily. I mean, imagine that. Imagine being on that boat.

What would you have done? Guys, stop being afraid. Jesus is right there and He's sleeping. I mean, they didn't do that.

They got afraid. And Christ says, you have a faith problem. You have a faith problem.

Your faith is little. You're not trusting Me. You're not seeing how great and how big I am.

You're not seeing what it says in Joshua, what it says here, that I'm with you wherever you go. Wherever. Wherever means wherever for you, Christian.

The Lord is with you. And again, if you think about the implications of that, there's some trial that you and I face where we need this truth. We need it.

But I'll mention later. So Christ diagnosed the issue of fear as an issue of little faith, of lacking trust in Him, of falling into unbelief. And again, amazingly, they had Christ physically before their eyes, and He was being a lived out example of not being afraid in any circumstance.

Right? Jesus wasn't telling them, don't be afraid. He was living it out by sleeping on a boat in the midst of a storm. And why was He able to sleep? Why could He have such a calm? He gives the answer in His response to them.

Or they say it to Him. What do they say to Jesus after He calms the storm? He has authority over what? Even the wind and the sea obey Him. Do you realize that? Of course, you can rest in the midst of a storm if you have authority over the very elements of nature, and you can command it to cease and to stop.

And Christ is doing that for them, and He's doing it for you and I. Brethren, there might be some great storm that you're in the midst of, and you're afraid because you're not acknowledging the Christ authority over whatever that thing is that is happening in your life. And if you recognize that authority, you could look at Christ asleep in the midst of it, and you could follow His example, lay down on the boat, in the boat, not

on the boat, in the boat, and you could rest. I mean, imagine if the disciples would have just copied Christ right there.

He would have woken up and said, you guys, you learned. You learned the lesson. They got the point.

But what did they say? We're perishing. I mean, that's a really grim outlook, right? Christ is bodily there with you, and that's your response? We're perishing? They weren't going to perish. They were led to see their present circumstances in an overly morbid way.

And often, brethren, that can happen to you. You look at your situation, and there's absolutely a circumstance that is, yes, I would rather be in a boat, not in the midst of a great storm, than on a boat in the midst of a great storm. But let's not make it bigger than it is.

By doing that, we're minimizing the greatness of God, and minimizing His authority, even over the wind and the waves. And so our text says, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Now, Christ is with us in a different way than He was with those disciples.

He has departed. He's given us His Spirit, and He's told us He'll always be with us, and we go on by faith, not by feelings, believing His promises. And His very Spirit, the Bible says your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

I mean, you want to talk about God being with you? God the Spirit lives in you, Christian. You can make Him grieve by your actions, like sinful fear in the midst of a trying situation where we should trust in the Lord. So fear is rooted in unbelief and doubting the Lord.

In the text, it's interesting how He says in verse 4, even though I walk through, right, walk through. All of us are presently walking through something. You're in the midst of something, maybe it's not.

As Don Kern and many have said, you're either in a trial, going through a trial, or about to get into a trial. And that's often true in the Christian life, because we are sheep in the midst of wolves. But I walk through.

I mean, what you're walking through right now, are you experiencing by faith comfort, or are you afraid? Or are you wrestling? Or you know what I've seen some in the past? People, they stop wrestling to trust the Lord, and they end up getting angry at God. Their trial, which was meant to lead them to worship the Lord and trust Him, led them to apostasy and anger at the hand of God and what He brought on their life. And they abandoned Him.

You don't want that to happen. Fretting leads to evil. I'll tell you one evil fretting can lead to is apostasy and is renouncing the Lord in the midst of your unbelief.

Now the text says, I will fear no evil. What's he talking about? Evil? Sure. The metaphor, there's multiple ways you could look at that in a valley.

What's he talking about? Is he talking about a wolf tearing you apart? Is the evil you wandering too far and being lost from the fold forever? And you're not fearing that because He's going to go after you? Is it facing physical suffering? Is it you facing calamity that is brought on? Is it you facing the enemy, the evil one? I will fear no evil. Evil is evil as we even can look at Matthew 6. Is it you sinning? Is it you sinning and not fearing the evil brought upon your life by the hand of God because of your sin? Because you see that it's God bringing that upon your life to discipline you. Evil comes in many different shapes and sizes.

And you know, the text doesn't say no evil will come upon you. What's it say? Is that what it says? I will fear evil will never come upon me. It says I will fear no evil, right? It doesn't say evil's not going to come.

It says not to fear it when it does come. Think about this. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4.14, you got the same word here.

Alexander the coppersmith did him great evil. I mean, does Paul go to Psalm 23 and say, well, you know, the Psalm said I will not experience evil. Paul, that's not what it says.

It says I will not fear it. Are you and I going to experience evil as far as physical suffering and wickedness from people? Yeah, we absolutely are. We're sheep in the wolves.

Even Ananias described Saul prior to conversion and said, think of how much harm he has done to your saints. Or we could take this language here. Ananias is saying, look how much harm he's done to your sheep.

Did the great shepherd fail by allowing evil to happen to the sheep, even through the hands of Saul, who eventually gets converted and is now one of the shepherds under shepherds of the sheep? I mean, what a thing. A guy's involved in killing Christians, doing harm and evil to them, and then he gets converted and now he's having evil done to him as he tries to protect and love these saints. What about Stephen? What happened to Stephen? Did Stephen fear evil when he got stoned? Is there anything there that indicates he was afraid? No.

You know what we see? We see Stephen seeing Christ standing at the right hand of the throne of God. Seems getting a vision even into heaven and seeing the Lord Jesus there. You want to talk about your shepherd being with you in the midst of a trial? He was with Stephen there as he got stoned.

And Stephen did not fear the evil, for the Lord was with him. So is harm going to happen to sheep? Absolutely. What you and I have to realize is we don't have to be afraid.

And so the text is not saying evil is not going to come. The text is saying when it does, don't be afraid. The reason being the Lord is with you.

He's with you. Now let's think again about evil. And you want to make sure you don't get so zoomed in on looking at the evil that's come in your life where you forget the source and who's allowed that evil to come.

All right, the same word here in Psalm 23, I will fear no evil. You find it in Isaiah 45 7. What's Isaiah 45 7 say? I form light, I create darkness, I make well-being, and I create evil, calamity. God allows calamity and evil.

Who allowed the calamity and the evil to fall upon Job? Who? The Lord. The Lord allowed it to fall upon Job. When David sinned, the Lord says, I'm going to send evil upon you.

Right? God did that to David as a punishment for his sin. And yet, you know what you see with David? You see the evil that fell upon him. Oh, it could have been far worse.

God was very kind in what he allowed. And even God allowed a wicked, evil man like Judas to be involved in the crucifixion of Christ. And yet it was in God's predetermined plan.

And you might not be able to understand all of that. You might struggle to have a grip on the sovereignty of God, even the sovereignty of God over evil and allowing things and not preventing certain things to happen like harm to a sheep. But he's promised you, brethren, whatever it is you're facing, you don't have to fear.

You don't have to be afraid. But evil will come at our doorstep. We live in a world of darkness.

But why will I not fear? For thou art with me. The Lord is my protector. The shepherd is watching over me.

He's protecting me. He's giving power. He's giving comfort.

He's reassuring me in the midst of facing evil. I mean, do you expect that in the midst of a trial? When you go into some serious trial, even when you go into death, I mean, let's put death in the picture here. Someone in Austin last week, they knew my father-in-law had died of cancer and they knew that we were with him when he was the two months as he died.

And they said, well, what was it like when he died? And was he afraid? I mean, people ask that. They wonder what it's going to be like. And we were all talking one night and then woke up in the middle of the night, his head heavy breathing and said his wife's name.

And then an hour later, he died. And there wasn't, you know, what's the Bible say? Death is like sleep. I was watching a person go to sleep.

No, he didn't have, there was no fear that could be discerned at any point leading up to that. It was like sleep. Do you expect this? I said all that because what do you expect in the midst of a dark season? What do you expect in a valley of the shadow of death? What do you expect in deep darkness? What do you, do you go into it expecting comfort? Do you expect you have a shepherd who wants to console your soul? Or do you go into it just, I'm going to be afraid.

I mean, that's just always how I respond. I always get so terrified when I face trials. Brethren, you and I can grow.

We don't have to be afraid as we face different trials. Okay, let me add this. Is the Lord telling us that he will lead us out of the fearful situation and then remove our fears? Is that, does the text say, I will fear no evil for you deliver me from the midst of the trial, so there's nothing to be afraid of, and then I feel comfort.

Is that what it says? No, it doesn't. It's saying the Lord's going to be with you in the trial and give you peace in the midst of the trial, and this matters. I was, I was looking up all these, the, the verses in the Old Testament that had that word fear, and one you come upon is in Psalm 78.

It says, he led out his flock like sheep and guided them like a flock. He led them in safety so that they were not afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. But if you go back to Exodus, you know what you find? You find the Israelites were greatly afraid as all the troops were coming up as they're next to the Red Sea.

They were terrified. They were terrified to the point they started even accusing Moses of why did you bring us to this point? When did the Israelites fear go away? After the sea was parted and they made it through and they saw their enemies being drowned. That's not what David is saying here in Psalm 23.

He's saying you can have peace before the sea is split, when the enemies are coming right up upon you. I mean anyone can have peace once the circumstance for trying them is gone. Of course that's easy.

That's not what's being promised, brethren. You're being promised peace as the chariots come head on at you and the sea is yet to part. So when it says he led them in safety so that they were not afraid, his leadership by splitting the sea led them to not be afraid.

But as you see shortly after that, they're already going back to idolatry. This is a group of majority of people who are unbelievers and not trusting the Lord. So the promise for you and I today is far greater than what took Israel's fear away.

We can be like Stephen getting stoned and the trial is not going away and yet there's peace because he is with us. You and I can be in the boat and the storm has not gone away and yet we have peace because he is with us. We're trusting his authority over the trial, the circumstance.

So can we overemphasize this thing of trusting in the Lord and his presence to remove your fears in the midst of trials? I think we don't emphasize that enough. Not saying in this church, but what's the world going to emphasize to remove your fears? You got to get out of the fearful circumstances. It's not dealing with the heart, right? I'm not saying there aren't times to get out of fearful circumstances.

You don't just stand there boldly with a martyr's complex. No, I'm not at all saying that. But brethren, many of us, we need to far more be going to Christ for comfort in the midst of a valley of deep darkness than we do.

When you think about it, one of the most significant challenges in a person's life in this fallen world is controlling their fear. Your fear, your anxiety. How do you manage your fear? How do you manage it? When you're afraid, what do you do? Do you trust in the Lord? Even if thousands encamp against you? What do you do? You know what you do? You manage your fear by realizing the perfect shepherd is managing and overseeing your life.

You hear that? You want to manage your fear. You got to believe Psalm 23, the Lord is managing your life. It's not about you managing fear as much as it is looking at the manager of your life and trusting in his abilities and his control.

It's not about you controlling your life. It's about you can looking and saying the Lord is control of all of these things. You want to root out fear.

The only true way is to be comforted by the fact that the Lord is with you. He's with you. I can't see him.

Faith. Got to believe. Call to my mind all these promises.

The Joshua text, the Psalm text. I got to pray. When you see that in the Psalms again and again, David just crying out to God.

We need to do that in the midst of fear, in the midst of betrayal. But many, you know, many that's not. They want to control their fear and control their circumstances in order to manage their fear.

You're never going to find true victory there. And so, no, we cannot overemphasize the company of God being that which is the true comforter for you, brethren, and whatever trial it is and whatever valley it is and whatever darkness it is that you are facing. And we're in a world that's going to point you in every other direction.

And even these so-called Christian counselors, in many ways, they're going to point you in every other direction to deal with the root issue of fear and the unbelief in your heart. You want to deal with the root. We don't need band-aids on our problems.

We need to deal with the heart problem. And Jesus is concerned about you being soothed in the midst of darkness. He's concerned about you and me when we face evil.

He's there with us. Whatever that evil looks like, whatever it's manifesting itself is, whatever calamity that God has allowed, He's with us. John 14, and I will ask the Father, He will give you another helper, a comforter.

No wonder that we can be comforted. He's given us a comforter. And what did He say about the Spirit? The Spirit's going to be with us till when? To be with you forever.

Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, you know Him. Why? For He dwells with you, and He will be with you. Brethren, if you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit with you.

It's not just the Spirit's presence convicting and working in the room, but you have the Spirit of God living in your physical body of flesh, because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He dwells with you. He will be with you.

And then He goes on, He says, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. It's not peace that the world gives.

No, that's not what I give. Then He says, let your hearts not be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Why should we not be afraid according to Jesus right there in John? Because He's with you.

He's left the Spirit. He's left the comforter. He's with you.

The Lord is my shepherd. I will not want. He's with me.

I will not fear evil that comes upon me. I mean, this is all over the Bible. We love Isaiah 41, and we should love Isaiah 41.

The Lord is speaking to the Gentiles whom He took from the ends of the earth, and He says, I've chosen you, and I've not cast you off. Fear not. Why? What? For I'm with you.

Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. That's a lot of promises to trust right there. You're my God.

You'll strengthen, help, uphold. I mean, take that to the Lord in the midst of the trial, where you feel like I'm not being upheld. The Bible again and again, it shows that to manage your fear, you have to manage your faith.

And that is, you've got to believe Christ. You've got to believe His Word. You've got to trust His Word in the midst of the trial, in the midst of suffering, in the midst of death, in the midst of a season after you've fallen into sin, whatever it is you're facing, He is the only option.

And when people come to you, and they emphasize Christ being the answer to you, they're doing that with a very good reason, because that's what the Bible does. In the midst of that, you don't want to let the words fall on deaf ears and look at it and say, well, that's not what I expected. I don't want a verse.

I want something new. Brethren, we don't need something new. We need the same thing said to us again and again and again, and reminded of it again and again and again, because it's our own unbelief that hesitates to receive this as the cure for fear.

So we just consider part of the text, I think it seems straightforward to interpret. And I think it's actually as straightforward to live out. Simply trust Jesus.

Yeah, that can be difficult. Are we weak? Yeah, we are. We're so weak.

Notice what He does here. What's the first word in verse 4? Yeah, some say yea, others say what? What's the ESV say? Even. And that's a good translation.

It's a good translation the way it says that. What does that even do? It shows this emphasis that's being given. It's like asking the Lord, well, will you be with me here? And the Lord's response is yes, even.

Even there, I will be with you. You see, and you know what that tells me? Us sheep, we need things emphasized to us, because you know what we can do? We can look at the things and think of the possible exceptions. I mean, the Lord's going to be with me in all these places, but not over there, right? He's not going to be with me there.

David says, even there He is. Even there, He will be with you. He will be with you.

Yes, even there, I'll be with you. I mean, where do you want Christ to emphasize this to you? Where are you most doubting Him being with you right now in your life, Christian? Where do you most feel the need for His protection and comfort and assurance? I mean, where? Do you have to create some exception? Do you think that God's far off? Is He far off for the unbeliever who's rejecting Him? Is He far off for the one who willfully rejects the truth? Yes, but Christian, in the midst of all the apostasy, you don't want these promises to seem far off to you in the midst of your fears. You want to be able to trust that Christ is with you.

I mean, when evil men surround you, or maybe you've just sinned and done evil yourself, can you say, He's with me? There's all these fears that enter in my mind of harm from the enemy, or maybe even wondering if God's going to harm me because what I've done. So, let's transition now into trying to define, in part, what David speaks of here as far as this valley of the shadow of death and the rod and the staff. Let's turn to Ezekiel 34.

Let's turn to Ezekiel 34 in your Bible. Why am I having this turn here? If you look at the last verse, verse 31, and you are my sheep, human sheep of my pastor. Right? And that matters because if we're trying to interpret a metaphor, and there's like 40 verses in the Bible that I could try to get into, but I feel like that's too overwhelming.

And at the same time, whatever point I'm trying to make here, I want you to realize, I take Psalm 23 in a broader way. I've been throwing things out at you throughout this sermon of where places the Lord's going to be with you and not fearing evil. I've been throwing those different things out because I think you can put it all encompassing in this promise here in Psalm 23.

But here we've got a chapter describing a human sheep. We're not going to read the whole chapter, but look at, he's rebuking the shepherds of Israel. Right? Verse 4, it says, some have strayed and you've not brought them back.

The lost you have not sought with force and harshness. You have ruled over them so that they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the wild beast. My sheep were scattered.

They wandered over the mountains for six and on every high hill, my sheep were scattered all over the face of the earth with none to search or to seek for them. It says in verse 8, my sheep became a prey. He says in verse 10 at the end, my sheep no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves.

I will rescue my sheep from their mouths that they may not be food for them. Verse 11, he says, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. At the end of verse 12, he says, they've been, listen to this, I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

What's he going to do? Verse 14, he says there, he's going to bring us to grazing land that we could lie down in the good grazing land and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. Verse 16, I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak.

So what, I mean, which one of these human sheep are you? In verse 16, if any, the lost, the strayed, the injured, the weak. I mean, that's all illustrative of something in someone's life. Is it all talking about the same thing? Is it all talking about these sheep and this metaphor that they're all just facing real severe trials in their life? No, I mean, some have wandered into sin.

Others have not been being fed and they're being taught error through false teachers and that's affecting them. And these people are, you know, taking all their money for their own greed, like a lot of the prosperity gospel people. I mean, you got different categories of what these sheep are going through here in this chapter.

The injured, maybe you're, you have a wound and you need to be healed. He says in verse 21, because you push with side and shoulder and thrust at all the weak with their horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will rescue my flock and they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

And then he says, verse 27, when I break the bars of their yoke and deliver them from the hand of those who have enslaved them, they shall no more be prey to the nations, nor shall the beast of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely and none shall make them afraid. I mean, there you see it.

You got a shepherd coming in there and he's wanting to, he's wanting to get his sheep to not be afraid. But you've got a lot of sheep afraid in different situations. You've got injured ones, strayed ones, malnourished ones.

And the shepherd looks on all of that. The malnourished, he wants to supply so that they would say, I shall not want. He wants to bring them to these plain of green pastures that they could feast.

So the ones who've wandered away, he wants to go after them and leave the 99 and bring that person back that they would have and know and receive the truth. And he wants all of them to be in a place where

they don't have fear. Now, from this chapter, does it help us at all in trying to think what could the shadow of death even represent? This valley, turn back to Psalm 23, even though I walk, David is sheep.

He's walking through a valley of the shadow of death. He says, I will fear no evil for you are with me. I mean, in Ezekiel, you've got physical rulers failing to provide food, facing fearful situations.

You've got sheep who've strayed and they've wandered and they've gone into sin. And you even find there that deep darkness came upon them. And that's when a lot of this happened.

Some darkness came upon them and they were, what happened to them? They were scattered. Here my point is, when he says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, look at the ESV. What's it say is a proper translation of that.

The valley of what? Deep darkness, right? I don't think the emphasis here is you and I facing physical death. I mean, is the Lord going to be with you and I when we face physical death? Absolutely. He is going to be with you and I when we face physical death.

But if you look at Ezekiel and these other places and you look at these sheep, even you look at the rod and the staff, and what does the rod and the staff do? What is their purpose? Why does he even bring these tools out for the sheep? I mean, what situations have they even got themselves into by which he needs to use the tools? I mean, you know what you find about the rod and the staff often? It's not just tools used to tend the sheep, but it's tools used to rescue the sheep who have gone astray, even the sheep who have gone in to sin. They provide security for the sheep. The rod and the staff are used to discipline a wandering sheep.

You find that in the scriptures. You even find it being used to grab by the neck, so to speak, is what the shepherds would say. And so when you hear about him bringing down his rod or his staff, it's being used in that way.

Even David. What did Goliath say when David came to Goliath? You come to me with what? Sticks. Plural.

Meaning his rod and his staff. And he had his sling. I mean, is that what he's saying? Why would he bring a rod and a staff before him to face Goliath? I mean, some would say the rod was actually something you would throw at an enemy to protect the sheep.

And it was a shorter type of rod. And biblically, you find the rod often referring to is the stain of authority. And that sheep, he looks at that shepherd and that shepherd's got that rod.

The shepherd has the staff. There's this sense of authority. There's a sense of protection.

There's a sense of the shepherd being willing even to discipline me and strike me with the rod, even to bring me back from going astray. So remember, David, he says, even in the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord will be there. Even.

He's explaining a situation where you would least likely expect the shepherd to be. I mean, would you least likely expect the shepherd to be with you when you're on your deathbed? I mean, does the Bible talk like that? Is that where you and I would least likely expect? Where I would need it emphasized to me, even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, referring to physical death. If that's referring to

physical death, is that what David is trying to emphasize here to you and I? I mean, if this is simply, you know, a shepherd talking about a sheep going through a valley, some would say, oh, and the seasons are changing and the shepherd is he's bringing them through the valley to get them to the to the green grass.

Many would say that's what's happening here. I mean, that's a given that the shepherd is going to be with the flock when they're going through a valley to get up to the green grass. Would that be what David is trying to emphasize here in this song? And you know what? I find it it's it's it's difficult.

It's difficult as I've tried to wrestle through what is happening here. Why does David say even? I mean, of course the Lord would be with them on that journey to go to get green grass. David emphasizes even in the shadow of death, even in deep darkness, the Lord is with him.

This seems to indicate that it's a place where for some reason the sheep might think shepherd is not there. Where would a place be where the sheep might think the shepherd is not there? I mean, why would a sheep think the shepherd would not be there? This would happen after they have done what? Sin. After they've done what from Ezekiel 34? Thick darkness has come over them and what's happened to some of them.

They've strayed, they've wondered, and they have every cause to fear evil happening to them because they don't see the shepherd with them. They're away from him. I mean, when they're walking in paths of righteousness, there's this closeness to the Lord there that they're experiencing.

So I'm just asking the questions. I've tried to study with this. And again, what I'm saying right here about the Lord being with you, even when you sin, you're going to see it's a biblical truth, whether it's being emphasized here or not.

But it's this valley of deep darkness symbolizing spiritual darkness and David's life that came when he wondered and sinned. And David affirms that even there in that valley of spiritual darkness, even there the Lord was with me. And then he explains how the Lord was with him and the Lord with him with a rod and a staff.

The Lord was disciplining him and protecting him from further evil by sending Nathan the prophet to him. You know what? For many of us, our fear of the Lord not being with us is not when we're facing a fiery trial. It's when we've sinned.

It's when you fell into anger or some of you fell into lust. Right there there's a fear, some darkness. They're grieving the Spirit.

This presence, it's not the same. And right, it's not going to be the same when we sin. But to find hope, the Lord, no, He's not abandoned me down to the pit.

He's with me. I've got to trust Him. Now, I hope to show you how this could be possible about what David is emphasizing here, but obviously it's taught elsewhere, even if not what he's emphasizing here.

But clearly from the life of David, this truth is taught. Turn to Psalm 107. So what happened is I'm trying to study Psalm 23 and you search the Hebrew phrase, the shadow of death.

The passage it takes you to is Psalm 107. And I find it interesting what we read in Psalm 107. So I want to consider that.

And you might even say, well, David, James, you already talked about the Lord restoring my soul. Yeah, but if you're still in Psalm 23, if your finger's still there, notice how David's speaking leading up to this. He makes me.

He leads me. He restores my soul. He leads me.

And then he switches. He's not just describing what the Lord's going to do. He's speaking of his own experience that he's had in his life.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he says, I will fear no evil for he is with me. It's like he's giving this conclusion based upon who the Lord is and the Lord being one who restores my soul. The conclusion I'm giving to you is yes, even there, he's going to be with me, his rod and his staff.

They're going to be used to bring comfort to me, restoration to me, discipline to me, to bring me on with the shepherd. I won't be abandoned even in the midst of my sin as a Christian. It's a part of what making me share any of this is Psalm 107.

And you find in Psalm 107, look at verse 10, you find this language being used there. And I realize it's not in the metaphor of a sheep, but verse 10, it says sunset in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners and afflictions and in irons. Well, how did they get in darkness and in the shadow of death? What's he say? Conjunction.

They have rebelled against the words of God and they have spurned the counsel of the most high. So what did he do? He bowed their hearts down with hard labor, right? There's a sense of this discipline, even in David's life, Psalm 32, you know, his hand was heavy upon me. My strength is dried up as by the heat of the summer.

But then look at verse 14, or 13, they cried to the Lord in their trouble. He delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and of the shadow of death and burst their bonds apart.

And look, their issue here, it's more than just they're going to physically die. They've rejected and spurned the word of the Lord. There's a spiritual darkness.

Yes, even with the calamity, sin leads to death. And they no doubt would face physical death. But what got them in the darkness was they rebelled against the words of the Lord.

Turn to 2 Samuel 12. 2 Samuel 12. This is Nathan rebuking David for his adultery and his murder and all of that.

And look what Nathan, how Nathan describes David. Verse 9, why have you despised the word of the Lord to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and you've killed him. Verse, he goes on to say, now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house because you've despised me.

And you've taken the wife of Uriah. I mean, what did David do here? He rejected the Lord. He despised the word of the Lord.

And the Lord says in verse 11, behold, I'll raise up evil against you even out of your own house. God is sending evil and raising evil up against David because of his sin. I mean, think it, you just murdered someone.

You committed adultery. You've murdered someone. What would be the one thing you would be expecting in the midst of that grievous sin? Yeah, God's going to strike you dead.

There's no pardon. There's no forgiveness. There's no mercy.

But what does David say? What does Nathan say in verse 13? The Lord also has put away your sin and you shall not die. Okay. And then the Lord says, I'm going to take the child.

Does David just resign to the fact his child's going to be taken? I mean, the Lord's already said it's going to happen. You know what David does? Look at verse 22. He's praying and he's fasting.

After the child dies, he gets to give an explanation. I fasted and I wept for I said, who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me. Wait, David, why are you thinking about the You just had a guy killed.

You just committed adultery. You just been lying for all of this season. How dare you, David, think about God's grace being there for you in the midst of this valley of darkness that you've brought upon yourself by rejecting the word of the Lord.

No, no. The Bible says, Christian, you should hope upon his grace in the midst of that. That's the very time you need the most to believe the promises of the gospel.

That's the time you need the most to believe the love of God for your soul. If you don't and you give into unbelief and you do, one sin leads to a further sin. That's the path to apostasy.

Don't go that route. Go the path of faith, of rising up, of believing the Lord. Like the man in Psalm 107.

He was in darkness and in the shadow of death and deep darkness. But the shepherd had a covenant with him. Look at 2 Samuel 7. Turn back a few pages here.

Look at this. What the Lord's covenant to David is. And we find these same realities given to us as new covenant believers.

You've already heard about it in John 14 and John 17. We've got something far greater even than Christ with us bodily. We've got a spirit within us.

But look at 2 Samuel 7 verse 9. He says, I've been with you wherever you went. And there you got the Lord promising to be with him wherever he goes. And look at verse 14.

He says, I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son. When he commits sin, what's the Lord going to do? I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men. But in the midst of the discipline, what's not going to happen? But my steadfast love will not depart from him as I took it away from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

These are amazing promises. But chapters later, David needs those promises after his sin. He needs some, he needs a place to hope in.

He needs promises of the steadfast love of God. Christian, after you've sinned, do you look to the steadfast love and the graciousness of God? I mean, is your gospel such good news that people would say, oh, does that mean you can just continue in sin that grace may abound? Because Paul's gospel was so good. That's what he had.

He had to qualify it and state in Romans 6, do we continue in sin that grace may abound by no means? Because what he was saying about Christ was so glorious, people concluded you could continue in sin that grace may abound. And Paul goes on to say how you can't do that because you've been regenerated and God's made a covenant with you, has given you a spirit. You can't continue in sin if you're truly his.

But our God, is he that gracious? Is he that forgiving? Is he that willing to be with us? Even in Psalm 32, when David talks about this strength being dried up in spite of the heat of the summer and all this darkness he faced, he said, many are the sorrows of the wicked, but the steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. David found comfort in the midst of sin because of the loving promises of his good shepherd. You and I need the same.

And so, yeah, maybe this is stretching what the valley of darkness, deep darkness could be, but I trust you even see right here in David's life. Brethren, David was a man who even after he sinned, he could look and hope in the graciousness of a good and a kind God. Even though he went through a valley of the shadow of death, the Lord did not leave him.

The Lord was not gone from him in the midst of that darkness. Even God allowed evil to come, and you don't need to fear the evil. If God uses an evil to be part of what disciplines you, you want to rejoice in God's love to pursue you.

I remember at the Grace House years ago, Tim doing a Bible study, and he's talking about assurance of salvation, and he said one of the times he has the greatest assurance he's a child of God is when his father is disciplining him, because then you know, I'm not an illegitimate child like Hebrews 12 says. The Lord's bringing the rod after me. Yes, the staff, it's defending me from further evil.

Yes, even the rod, there's authority there to pardon sin, and he has all power. And look, one day there's going to be a rod of iron to judge the nations, and Christ is going to come back, and our only hope is to be in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our only hope is his steadfast love surrounds us.

You know, having hope in this darkness, to me, it's greater news than just facing some violent person wanting to do me evil. I mean, I don't know about you. If there's a violent person wanting to do me evil, that can be terrifying, but you know where I really need a hope of the promise of God is when I'm in the darkness of despising the word of the Lord and grieving the Holy Spirit.

And you know what the Bible says to you? You know what it says? If you cry to him, if you look to him, he's there with you. He's not far off. I mean, did the Lord lead David into this valley? He just talked about the Lord leading him.

Then he says, even though I walk through, I'm walking through something, and even there where I maybe wouldn't expect the Lord to be there, he's with me. And I don't have to fear evil. He's with me even to the end.

And so, what's that saying to you? What I'm trying to say to you is the Scriptures give this aroma and this reality that even though you reject the word of God and go on and sin and do evil in his sight, even there his steadfast love will not depart from you if you're a Christian. If that sounds wrong to you, then you got to renew your mind. It shouldn't sound wrong to you.

When I sin, his steadfast love is there. He's with me. Why didn't he stop me from sinning? You know what? He is going to stop you if you're really his.

He's going to stop you from keep on going and sin. He's going to pull out the rod. He's going to be there with you.

And think, what's perfect love supposed to do? 1 John 4. What's it say? There's no fear in love, but perfect love does what? Cast out fear. Even in my sin, I'm not afraid of some judicial wrath from God that's going to fall upon me because it is finished and all that wrath was absorbed upon Christ on the cross and all the anger that I deserve in hell for all of an eternity, it fell down upon the Son, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know what? The enemies were ready to devour me.

Look what he says in verse 5 in Psalm 23. I mean, these very enemies are accusing me and they're ready to devour me and they're ready to end my life. He says, you know, I'll prepare a table before the Lord prepares a table before me, even in the presence of my enemies.

He anoints my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And I realize we don't know when David wrote Psalm 23, whether it's at the beginning of his life or later on. But it sure seems like it was later on with some of the things that he's saying.

You could almost feel like it's wrong for David to say that only goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. Brethren, that's what you see in his life. Through God's discipline, God rebuking him, God drawing him to himself, God dealing with this sheep.

You see the tender, loving care of the Lord in the life of David. And brethren, that's the same type of love that you and I are having in our lives right now from our Father. And yes, the Bible teaches, brethren, even when you sin, the Lord is not going to forsake you there.

And you believing that, that's one of the evidences you're a true Christian. I mean, you're trusting him and an evidence that you don't continue on in sin that grace may abound because grace is so powerful. It's going to keep you from going on and living in sin.

So David had such a view of the Lord's graciousness that even though the Lord told him his son would die, he still was holding out for graciousness. That is absolutely incredible. Maybe you're saying this right now, Psalm 40.

You're saying, for evils have encompassed me beyond number. My iniquities have overtaken me and I cannot see. There are more than the hairs of my head and my heart fails me.

But you know what he said right before that? He said, as for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me. Your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me. I mean, we've got a hope in the steadfast faithfulness of the Lord.

Even when sin overtakes us, the great shepherd with his pierced hands, who's interceding for you, who will restore you, who will lead you through the valley of deep darkness, the thickness that's around you, whether that's you facing death, whether it's you facing a severe trial like Stephen. I mean, the thing with Stephen, what darkness? There's nothing about darkness in Acts chapter eight. All you got is a bunch of light and glory as this man is being killed and martyred and going to be with the Lord.

It's rather a glorious situation that is described there. And you know what? Apart from Christ, you're in darkness here today. Listen to what it says in Job.

He calls the whole earth this exact same term, the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom and thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order. But you know what? A light has come. Matthew quotes the prophecy in Matthew four, the people dwelling in darkness.

It's the same word, shadow of death. The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light. And for those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death on them, a light has dawned.

And you might feel it. You might be here today and all you see is darkness. There's no light.

There's nothing. Christ is the light of the world. Why do men not come to Christ? Because they don't want their deeds to be exposed.

And my plea to you, if you don't know Christ, get in the light. Expose yourself before him. And if you're one of his sheep and you've fallen into something, expose that too before the Lord and confess your sins.

He is faithful and just to forgive you of all of your sins. I mean, the devil wants you to doubt the Lord after you've sinned. What I'm trying to emphasize to you is that even then he's with you.

And he can comfort you through discipline and his authority to forgive and to protect you from further evil. His rod and his staff, you can find comfort from that. You can find comfort even from the rod and the staff.

If you want to look at it as the Word of God and the Spirit, as some would take the rod and the staff to be representing right there in that passage, you find comfort from that. The shepherd is not far off. I mean, you might be doubting the Lord.

Don't. Don't doubt his authority. Don't doubt his power.

I mean, how important is it for us to be fearless? It's really important. Paul said that when you're not frightened in anything by your opponents, it's a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of our salvation and that from God. And one of the areas that we need to not be fearful is when we sin, we need to take those fears to the Lord that even the brethren who know us, even our children who know us, they see that there is a peace and a rest.

There's not a sense of condemnation that I'm sensing as a Christian because there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It's all been removed. So brethren, we have a good shepherd.

We have a great shepherd. Provides our needs. He's actively doing that now.

He actively leads us. He actively restores us. He does it for his namesake.

And then David adds in here personally, he says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you're with me, your rod and your staff that comfort me. Whether he's alluding or hinting at what I just explained from Psalm 107 and 2 Samuel, you saw it. David went through a rod being on his back.

He went through darkness for despising the Lord. And you saw him with your own eyes from that text. He was still banking on the steadfast, gracious love of God.

That's what you and I need this morning. Psalm 3 says, I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. And I would just say, I will not be afraid, though thousands of accusations of the enemy come against me, I can plead the blood of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, Lord, I thank You for Your love for us, Your tender care. Lord, even when clouds of thick darkness come, and Lord, some stray, some wonder.

Lord, some even despise Your Word like David did. And yet even there, You're not far off. Lord, the places we might least think that You would be there with us, Lord, You say even there.

You emphasize that. David emphasizes it to us. Lord, I pray that You'd emphasize that to my brethren's hearts.

Lord, whatever it is that they're going through right now, and they need that even there, You're there with them. That even there, Your presence is able to comfort them. Lord, even there, Your staff is able to defend them.

Even there, Your Word is able to speak truth to them because You're the God of comfort. Even there, if it's sin, Your rod is able to discipline them that they would not continue on in it. Lord, help us to believe these realities.

And Father, I've been comforted thinking about David and all that You've done in his life. And Lord, there's times it seems like he takes Your grace in a way that we wouldn't. Lord, it seems like he's... Why would he even pray for his child to live when You've already said the child would die? Lord, it almost doesn't make sense.

But Lord, I get it. He did that because he sees how gracious You are. And so, Lord, there might be someone in our lives, some family member even, that it looks like they're dead.

They're spiritually dead. There's no hope for them. And Lord, we don't want to stop fasting and praying as David did for them, because Lord, even for them, yes, even for them, You might still be gracious to the Mad Hanes and the others.

And so, Lord, we just appeal to You. Father, I pray You'd encourage Your saints. Lord, be with us in this meal, in this time of fellowship that we would be able to encourage and stir each other up.

Pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

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