

The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death

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[0 : 00] Well if we could with the Lord's help this evening, I want us to read one verse from Psalm 23, the key verse that we're looking at this evening as we go into the pilgrim's progress again.

Psalm 23 and at verse 4, where David writes there, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

As you know this evening, we're resuming our study in the pilgrim's progress and over the past few months we've walked with John Bunyan's pilgrim, we've been walking along the King's Highway and we're walking from the city of destruction and our destination is the celestial city.

And in that time as you know, we've witnessed a change take place in this man's life. We saw his name change, change from graceless to Christian.

We saw his burden change, his burden of sin was removed and it rolled away into the tomb. We saw that his clothing was changed, his clothing was transformed from rags to riches and even his heart was changed, his heart that was once filled with anxiety, is now filled with assurance.

[1 : 22] Everything has changed in Christians experience. He has become a new creation in Christ. The old has passed away and all things have become new. But you know, we've not only witnessed a change taking place in Christians experience, we've also witnessed Christian growing in grace.

We've witnessed Christian growing in grace and in the knowledge of his Saviour, Jesus Christ. Because like every Christian, this Christian grew in grace and he grew in grace through those whom he met, the mistakes he made and the mountains he climbed.

But as we've walked with Christian, we've come a long way with him. In fact, we're now more than halfway in the pilgrims progress and we've been through a lot.

We've walked with Christian along the King's Highway. We fled from the city of destruction. We were delivered from the slough of despond. We passed through the Wicked Gate. You'll remember we explored the interpreter's house.

We stood there at the cross. We persevered up the hill called difficulty. We lodged at the palace beautiful. And then last time we fought with Apollyon in the valley of humiliation.

[2 : 35] And it was in the valley of humiliation that we were taught that Jesus is our commander in chief. And as pilgrims, we have all been enrolled and enlisted in the Lord's army.

Therefore we're to make sure, we're to make sure, my Christian friend, that every morning we wake up, we're to go into our armory and we're to pick up our weapons so that we're ready to stand up and stand firm against the wildness of the devil.

But you know, as we continue our journey with Christian this evening, we see that what we see is that the valley of humiliation, it leads right into another valley, the valley of the shadow of death.

And I'd like us to think about the valley of the shadow of death this evening under three simple headings, the valley, the villains and the victory, the valley, the villains and the victory.

So first of all, the valley. Now remember that when Christian arrived at the palace beautiful, it was after he had climbed up the hill called difficulty.

[3 : 47] And it was at the palace beautiful that Christian enjoyed a period of rest, relief and refreshment. And it was also at the palace beautiful that Christian went into the armory.

He was led into the armory and he was told to put on his armour and to pick up up his weapons of warfare so that he'd be ready to stand up and stand firm against a Pollyan as he would go into the valley of humiliation.

And so on one side of the palace beautiful was the hill difficulty that Christian had to climb and ascend to reach the palace beautiful. But then on the other side of the palace beautiful was the descent into the valley of humiliation.

And as we said before, the palace beautiful was what we would call a mountain top experience. It was a place of rest, relief and refreshment so that Christian could continue his pilgrimage.

But as you know, my Christian friend, the Christian life isn't a series of mountain top experiences because as a Christian, you don't always live on the mountain top.

[4 : 57] You're not always walking in the clouds as it were and you're not always riding high in your Christian experience because as you know, maybe only too well, the Christian life is also full of valleys.

The Christian life is full of highs and lows. It's full of mountains and valleys. It's full of peaks and troughs. It's full of full of summits and even trenches.

And you know, what we see in this section of the pilgrims progress is that as Christian leaves the valley of humiliation and as he leaves battered and bruised from his fight with a Pollyon, he enters another valley, the valley of the shadow of death.

And you know, Bunyan writes, he says now at the end of this valley was another called the valley of the shadow of death. And he says, Christian must needs go through it because the way to the celestial city lay through the midst of it.

Christian must needs go through the valley of the shadow of death because the way to the celestial city lay through the midst of it.

[6 : 06] And you know what Bunyan is reminding us from the outset is that the Christian life, the pilgrims progress, it's not a series of mountain top experiences. No, more often than not, my friend, the pilgrims progress is a silly series of valleys where one valley leads into another valley.

One valley just leads off into another valley. And you know what Bunyan is actually giving to us in this section is some helpful pastoral theology because as you know, Bunyan was a pastor and he had a pastor's heart and he was well acquainted with all the trials and temptations of the Christian life.

And you can see that in which in the way in which Bunyan presents this narrative, because by now I'm sure that you're already you've already come to appreciate the brilliance and the beauty with which the pilgrims progress was written.

And as you read the narrative of this section, you're almost given a window into the pastor's heart of John Bunyan, because after having a fierce and ferocious fight with a Polly in the valley of humiliation, you know, you would almost expect Christian to have then another mountain top experience like he did at the palace, beautiful, where he could again experience and enjoy some rest and relief and refreshments so that it would enable him to go through another valley and continue in his pilgrims progress.

But that's not what happens, because that's not what happens in the Christian life, is it? You know, the pilgrims progress, it isn't a series of mountain top experiences or even a series of peaks and then troughs and peaks again, because you know, my friend, more often than not, the Christian life is just like going from one valley into another valley.

[8 : 03] And you know, with this Bunyan is telling us something deeply pastoral, that when we experience a valley, be it a valley of sin or a valley of sickness or a valley of suffering or a valley of sorrow, be it even a valley of conflict or a valley of confrontation or a valley of confusion, when we have encountered a valley in our experience and it's caused us to be more earnest in seeking the Lord in prayer and reading his word and even attending church, you know, after a valley, there's always the temptation that after we have emerged on the other side of the valley, there's always the temptation to then rest and seek relief and refreshment.

My friend, after the valley, there's always the temptation to rest on our laurels. After the valley, there's always the temptation to to be apathetic because of our achievements of getting through that valley.

After a valley, there's always the temptation to slip back and be sluggish and slothful when seeking the Lord. You know, the valley often teaches us and encourages us to seek the Lord.

But when we come out of the valley, there's always that temptation to become sluggish and slothful again. After the valley, there's always the temptation to to glory in our gains and our growth.

After the valley, there's always the temptation to leave off, persevering in the pilgrims progress. And you know, this, this is so true.

[9 : 36] Maybe you know to be true in your own Christian experience, the reality of the Christian life is that one valley just often leads into another valley.

For the first valley, it may have been a valley of sin, but then it leads into a valley of sickness or suffering or sorrow. The first valley may be in a valley of conflict and then it leads into a valley of confrontation and confusion.

My friend, the Christian life is like one valley into another valley. You know, I don't know about about you, but if you remember last March, when we first went into lockdown, we were actually working through a study on mountains, mountains that are mentioned in the Bible.

We didn't finish the study. In fact, we were nowhere near finished the study. And I'd like to finish the study at some point in the future. But we were considering some of the mountains that are mentioned in the Bible, such as Mount Ararat and Mount Moriah and Mount Sinai and Mount Nebo and Mount Carmel and Mount Zion.

There's all these mountains. And we saw that many of the well-known characters in the Bible, they all had mountaintop experiences. But you know, I was thinking that it's equally true that many of the well-known characters in the Bible, they also had valley experiences.

[10 : 59] And I'd also love to do a study on the valleys in the Bible because there are so many of them. There's the Kidron Valley. It's mentioned throughout the Bible. There's the Valley of Jordan, an important valley crossing into the Promised Land.

There's the Valley of Echor, which was where Echan sinned. There's the Valley of Salt, the Valley of Jezreel, the Valley of Eila, where David fought Goliath, the Valley of Hinnom, which was a representation of hell, the Valley of Tears, or Beka's Vale, Psalm 84.

There's the Valley of Vision in Isaiah, or the Valley of Dry Bones in the Book of Ezekiel. There are so many valleys that the Lord's people had to pass through. But what's remarkable is that through every valley experience, the Lord's people, they grew in grace and they grew in the knowledge of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

And you know, that's what it's like in the Christian life because it's in the valley that we grow in grace. And we see that here with Christian. One valley just led into another valley.

But as Christian confesses, his experience in the Valley of the Shadow of Death was much worse than his fight with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation.

[12 : 16] Because what we're told about the Valley of the Shadow of Death, what we're told is that this valley is a very solitary place. And the prophet Jeremiah, he describes it in Jeremiah chapter two.

He says, it's a wilderness, a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death. A land that no man but a Christian passes through and where no man dwelt.

My friend, the Valley of the Shadow of Death was a lonely place. It's a solitary place. It's a desolate and deserted place.

But it was as Christian approached the borders of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we read that he encountered what we could call the villains. He encounters the villains in the Valley, which brings us to consider, secondly, the villains.

So the valley and then the villains. The villains. But in your wights, I saw then in my dream that when Christian was got to the borders of the Shadow of Death, there met him two men, children of them that brought up an evil report of the good land, making haste to go back.

[13 : 32] So as Christian approached the Valley of the Shadow of Death, he was confronted by two men who tried to persuade him to turn back. But as Bunyan describes, these two men, they were villains because they were children of those who brought back an evil report from the promised land.

You'll remember in Numbers chapter 13, when the Lord commanded Moses to send those 12 spies into the promised land to bring back a report to the people.

And you'll remember that both Caleb and Joshua, they came back and said that if they persevered into the promised land, they would conquer it and occupy it.

But then there were the other 10 spies. Ten out of the 12 spies, they didn't want to persevere into the promised land. And so they lied. They brought back an evil report saying that it was impossible for them to conquer the promised land and occupy it.

And Bunyan says that now we see Christian being confronted by two of the children of these liars. They were two villains who didn't want to persevere into the promised land.

[14 : 45] And like their parents before them, they too came with an evil report about the Valley of the Shadow of Death. And you know, let's just listen into their conversation with Christian, because when Christian meets these villains, he says to them, where are you going?

And they say, back, back. And if you prize either peace or life, then you'll also turn back. And Christian says, why, what's the matter?

Matter, we were going the same way as you are now traveling. And we went as far as we dared. And indeed, we were almost past being able to come back. For had we gone a little further, we would not have been here to bring news to you.

But what have you met with? Said Christian. Why, we were almost in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. But fortunately, we looked ahead and we saw the danger before we came to it.

But what have you seen? Said Christian. Seen. Why the Valley itself, which is as dark as pitch. We also saw there the hobgoblins and the satires and the dragons of the pit.

[15 : 53] We also heard in the Valley a continual howling and yelling as of people under unutterable misery who sat bound in affliction and iron chains.

Over that valley, they say, hangs the discouraging clouds of confusion. Death has also spread his wings over it. In a word they say to Christian, it is in every way dreadful being utterly wither.

Without order. You know, as Christian received that evil report from the villains, he was being urged to stop parchevering towards the celestial city and to turn back.

But as you know, this wasn't the first time that Christian had been urged to turn back because he was urged to turn back by obstinate and pliable. He was urged and pleaded to turn back by Timorous and mistrust.

Even Mr. Worley Wiseman and Apollyon tried to persuade Christian to go back to the city of destruction. But you know, Christian's testimony.

[16 : 58] It was the testimony of the hymn writer. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back. Though none go with me.

I still will follow. No turning back. No turning back. My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

The world behind me. The cross before me. No turning back. No turning back. And that was Christian's testimony to these two villains who tried to persuade him to stop parchevering and to go back.

And you know, my friend, that needs to be our testimony as well. I've decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

I know Christian responded to the evil report by saying to these villains, in spite of what you have said, this is the way to my desired heaven.

[17 : 57] Christian knew that in order to get to the celestial city, he had to persevere and walk through the valley of the shadow of death. And with that, these two villains, they just step aside from Christian and they say to him, though it is your way, we will certainly not choose it for ours.

And so they parted company and Christian, he went on his way, but he went on his way with his sword drum because he was fearful that he might be attacked.

But Bunyan in the story, he continues by describing the valley of the shadow of death. He says, I saw then in my dream, as far as this valley reached, there was on the right hand a very deep ditch.

That ditch is it into which the blind have led the blind in all ages and have both miserably perished there. Then on the left hand, there was a very dangerous mire into which even if a goresly man falls, he would find nothing for his food to stand on.

And so as Bunyan explains, the pathway through this valley, it was very narrow and it was causing Christian a lot of difficulty in finding his feet and finding his balance because Christian thought that he was either going to fall into the ditch on the right hand or the mire on the left hand.

[19 : 21] But as Christian walked further and further into the valley of the shadow of death, we're told that it got darker and darker and darker. To the point that we're told that it got so dark that Christian didn't know what would happen when he took his next step.

And we read that when Christian reached the middle of the valley, that he saw the mouth of hell, which was very close to the narrow path.

And Christian were told that he could see flames and smoke. He could see sparks and he could hear hideous noises that seemed so close to him, but he couldn't see them.

These noises, he thought that he was either going to be burned or torn in pieces. This of course, we're told, at half tempted Christian to turn back.

Attempted him to turn back, but he resolved to persevere through the valley of the shadow of death. But you know, what caused Christian to persevere wasn't the fact that he was no longer afraid, but that he realized that in order to get through this valley, he needed a different weapon.

[20 : 39] We're told that Christian couldn't fight with his sword, as he did with a polyan back in the valley of humiliation. In fact, Christian was forced to put his sword back into its sheath and take up another weapon, the weapon called all prayer.

Because you remember when Christian was in the armory way back in the palace, beautiful, he saw all these manner of weapons which the Lord has provided for pilgrims. He saw the sword and the helmet and the shield and the breastplate and the shoes.

But there was also this weapon called all prayer. It was the last weapon, but not the least weapon. It was the last weapon that every Christian soldier should pick up in the armory before they go out to battle.

Were to pick up the weapon called all prayer, because were to be praying always says Paul, were to be praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

And Christian needed the weapon all prayer, especially when he came under attack from Satan. We read that just when Christian was over the mouth of the burning pit, one of the wicked ones snuck up behind him, whispering in his ear, many grievous blasphemies which Christian thought had proceeded from his own mind.

[22 : 14] This was the worst Satanic attack Christian has ever met with before, were told, to think that he would now blaspheme the Lord whom he loved so much.

You know Christian was experiencing dark Satanic assaults and attacks on his heart and his mind. And you know my Christian friend, I'm sure that you're familiar with what Bunyan is describing here.

I'm sure you've experienced these thoughts yourself, because in your Christian experience I'm sure that you've encountered the trials and temptations of Satanic assaults and attacks, where there are trials of the heart and of the mind.

There are temptations to despair, even to depression, because you've even been battered and bruised, I'm sure of it. Battered and bruised by bad and blasphemous thoughts, thoughts that seem to come from nowhere.

Because the thing is you don't want these thoughts and you don't seek these thoughts and you don't even like these thoughts. And yet it's like, as you read in the book, it's like one of Satan's minions coming and whispering in your ear, all these nasty thoughts, maybe about people, or about yourself, or about your experience, or what you're feeling.

[23 : 42] And they come, as Bunyan describes, they come from the pit of hell itself. And there are assaults and attacks from Satan. And these Satanic assaults and attacks, they can come into our heart in a number of ways, and even at any point in the day, even in the darkness of the night when we're lying in our bed.

Satan doesn't leave us even then. You know when Job experienced the onslaught of Satanic assault and attack, that's what the book is all about, how Satan is attacking an assaulting job.

Job often spoke about the darkness and the shadow of death. In fact, the phrase, the shadow of death, it appears 15 times in the book of Job, which only emphasizes to us the spiritual darkness and depression that Job experienced.

It emphasizes the Satanic assault and attack which Job was under as a Christian. But you know the question is, how do we respond?

Well, how did Christian respond? He responded by using the weapon, all prayer. Because prayer is the only weapon that can defend Christian in the valley of the shadow of death.

[25 : 08] And Christian prays for protection against the assaults and attacks of Satan. And he prays for perseverance that he will persevere as a pilgrim through the pilgrims progress.

You're my Christian friend when Satan tempts you to despair and even to depression and despondency in your Christian life, you're to respond with the weapon, all prayer.

And you're to cry and you're to even confess like Christian did. You're to say, oh Lord, deliver my soul. For I will walk in the strength of the Lord, my God, oh Lord, deliver my soul.

For I will walk in the strength of the Lord, my God. And it was as Christian used a weapon of all prayer that were told that he heard the voice of a man ahead of him in the valley, saying to him, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

And as you can expect, it's that voice which brought Christian victory in the valley, which brings us to consider lastly, the victory, the valley, the villains and the victory, the victory.

[26 : 30] You know, when Christian heard the voice of a man ahead of him in the valley quoting the well-known words of Sam 23, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

That voice was, of course, the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. And as you would expect, Christian found great comfort and assurance when he heard the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Because Christian knew immediately that he was a sheep of the Good Shepherd. He was a sheep which belonged and was bought by the Good Shepherd. You know, that was the promise of the Good Shepherd in John chapter 10.

My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life and they will never perish. Neither shall they be plucked out of my hand.

My friend, when Christian heard the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking to him in the valley of the shadow of death, were told that his heart was glad. His heart was glad.

[27 : 37] And his heart was glad because Christian came to realize that he wasn't walking alone in the valley of the shadow of death. In fact, Christian had the comfort and the assurance that the shepherd was not only with him in the valley, but the shepherd has also gone before him into the valley.

And that my Christian friend is the victory. The fact that the shepherd has gone ahead of us into the valley. The Good Shepherd has gone before his sheep into the valley of death.

And he did so by laying down his life for the sheep. You know what Jesus said? I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jesus had walked this path before Christian. He had trod in the way. He had paved the way for him. He had walked through the valley of death.

And like Christian, Jesus was tempted to go back. You remember how he was assaulted and attacked by Satan in the Garden of Gethsemane.

[28 : 47] How he sweated great drops of blood as he was brought to his knees before the shadow of Calvary. Where it was on the cross that our Good Shepherd, he endured the darkness of damnation and destruction and death.

And he did so. Jesus entered the valley of death in order to transform the valley of death into the valley of the shadow of death.

You know shadows can sometimes be scary, but a shadow is only created by light, not darkness. A shadow is created by light, not by darkness.

And as John says in his Gospel, when the light of Jesus shined in the darkness of sin and death, the darkness could not overcome it.

That was also the prophetic promise given in Isaiah that the people who walked in darkness, they have seen a great light, that they dwell in the land of the shadow of death, and upon them the light has shined.

[30 : 01] You know this is something the Puritan from the same era of John Bunyan, the Puritan Matthew Henry he picks up on in his commentary of Sam 23.

He says, death is before all of us. Death is before all of us. There's no hiding that fact. Therefore the Christian, it is only the shadow of death, because there's no substance of evil in it.

That's what Jesus has taken away. He's taken away the sting and the substance of death. There's no substance of evil in it. He says, just like the shadow of a serpent will not sting, or the shadow of a sword will not kill, or the shadow of a dog will not bite.

It's only the shadow of death. It's not the substance or the sting of death. My friend, for the Christian who is thrusting in the Good Shepherd, this valley, it's not the valley of death.

It's the valley of the shadow of death. And as Bunyan's pilgrim said about the Good Shepherd, he said, he has turned the shadow of death into mourning.

[31 : 13] He has turned the shadow of death into mourning. But you know my friend, without Jesus Christ as your shepherd, there's no light at the end of the valley of death.

Without Jesus Christ as your shepherd, the end of the valley of death will be eternal darkness, eternal domination, eternal destruction, and eternal death.

But for the Christian, and this is the hope that's being presented to us in the pilgrim's progress, the hope of the Christian is that for the sheep of the Good Shepherd, it will only be the valley of the shadow of death.

Because the comfort and the assurance of the Christian is that your Good Shepherd has not only gone before you into the valley. He also walks beside you in the valley.

He walks beside you in the valley so that you'll never walk alone. You'll never walk alone.

[32 : 22] And I'm sure that you heard in the news this past week that the lead singer in the band Jerry and the Pacemaker, he died.

Jerry Marston who died at the age of 78, he was famous for singing that well-known song you'll never walk alone. It's a song which became famous through Liverpool football club and up until the coronavirus broke out, these words were sung on football terraces all over the world, even including Celtic Park.

But now the voice of those words you'll never walk alone, that voice has fallen silent. And you know when I heard that Jerry Marston had died, the question which came to my mind was did he walk alone?

Did he walk alone? In life, Jerry Marston sang you'll never walk alone. But in death, did he walk alone?

I can't answer that question. No one can. But my friend, without Jesus Christ as your shepherd in life and in death, you will walk alone.

[33 : 39] Without Jesus Christ as your shepherd, there's no light at the end of the valley of death. Without Jesus Christ as your shepherd, the end of the valley of death will be eternal darkness, eternal damnation, eternal destruction and eternal death.

But with him. With Jesus Christ as your shepherd, your shepherd in life and your shepherd in death, the valley of death, it will only be the valley of the shadow of death.

And your comfort and assurance at death is that your good shepherd has not only gone before you into the valley, he also walks beside you in the valley so that you'll never walk alone.

You'll never walk alone. That's the security of the shepherd. Yea, though I walk in death's dark veil, yet will I fear none ill, for thou art with me, and I rod, and staff may comfort still.

My friend, unless the Lord comes again, we must all pass through this valley. And we must all encounter the villains.

[34 : 52] But the question is, are you trusting the good shepherd for the victory? Are you trusting the good shepherd for the victory?

Because as Paul says, thanks be to God for the Lord Jesus Christ who has given us the victory. My friend, can you say these words in Psalm 23?

The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. Well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray together. O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks to thee that in the midst of the valleys of life, that the shepherd is always with us, that whether it is the valley of sin, sickness, suffering or sorrow, that shepherd is beside us, assuring us that we will never walk alone.

And Lord help us to confess him daily, help us to live with him, and to look to him, and to love him. And to know that this shepherd promises never to leave us, never to forsake us, that he assures us that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life, and that in God's house forevermore, in that celestial city, we will enjoy peace with him, that we will enjoy that eternal fellowship for time without end.

[36 : 24] O Lord bless us we pray. Bless us in the week that lies ahead, a week that is unknown to us, but we give thanks that we are able to begin it by looking to the shepherd and confessing as David says in Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Go before us then we pray, do us good for Jesus' sake. Amen. But we'll conclude our service this evening by singing the words of Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 we're looking at the words from the Scottish Psalter, the well-known words of the shepherd Sam, and as I often say it's one thing to know Psalm 23, it's another thing completely to know the shepherd of Psalm 23, and we have to know the shepherd because we're all going to go through this valley, we need to know the shepherd.

The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want, he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me, the quiet waters by the whole Psalm to God's praise.

The Lord my shepherd I'll not want, he makes me down to lie in pastures green he makes me down to lie in pastures green he leadeth me, the quiet waters by the whole Psalm to God's praise.

[38 : 20] Amen.

If all I want in this I will, yes will I, dear not ill, for God art with me, and my Lord has not become person.

My table, black, has permission in presence of my foes, my head I toss with oil and white, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life, chastury follow me, and in my stars forevermore, my very best I'll be.