

# "Yea, Though..."

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[ 0 : 00 ] Tonight and actually tonight and next Sunday morning and next Sunday night.

! We're going to be in Psalm 23. You know, the theme, themes together.

Sunday morning is the same, Sunday night is a different theme. But I'm going to, here at the end of 2014, beginning of 2015, we're going to be in this Psalm.

I'm not planning on preaching all the way through the Psalm. That is, in the sense of trying to touch on every part of the Psalm.

But kind of pick some things that have just been really meaningful to me over the last several months. I don't know, you know, Psalm 23, of course, is very familiar to everyone.

[ 1 : 12 ] I think, arguably, the most favorite, most well-known, therefore, Psalm. Possibly one of the most memorized portions of Scripture in the Old Testament.

I would think John 3, 16 is probably the most memorized in the New Testament, possibly in the entire Bible. Psalm 23 also is one that has been a favorite to memorize.

And I can't even begin to imagine how many times I have, on one occasion or another, preached out of a portion of Psalm 23. I know that dozens of times I have brought people to Psalm 23 during funerals, as many pastors do.

And because the Bible just has so much to say to us when we're grieving, when we're hurting, when we have lost something or someone. And so Psalm 23 is very familiar.

I not only have preached out of it a number of times over the years, but I've also spent seasons meditating upon that Psalm. And I'm in one of those seasons now in my life, for obvious reasons.

[ 2 : 32 ] And so I want to share a word, not really an expository sermon starting with verse 1, but we're really going to focus in on verse 4 tonight.

And then I'm going to backtrack for next Sunday morning and then go to the end of the psalm on next Sunday. So we'll be kind of skipping around.

But all three of these messages, I think, will be very helpful, very valuable for us, really for any time. But especially here at the end of the year, the beginning of the year.

Because Psalm 23 is a life psalm. It's about life. And, in fact, a little bit later, I'm going to point out, and I've pointed this out before, that Psalm 23 is a valley psalm.

It's the valley, actually a valley between two mountains, Psalm 22 and 24. I'll point that out here a little bit later. But Psalm 23 is just where the tire hits the road.

[ 3 : 39 ] And so I guess that's why I quite often turn to it and why I have been meditating very much on it, really for the last several months.

Now, what I want to share with you tonight, again, comes out of Psalm 23, verse 4. Verse 4. And I have shared some of this before.

As a matter of fact, I shared much of what I'm going to share with you tonight with the prisoners at Dick Connor a couple of months ago.

And I want to share with you that. And I think I've also used this particular verse out of the psalm to speak to our men on one occasion a couple of years ago.

And so if some of this sounds familiar, then that's okay. Because Psalm 23 is just so rich. And if we've heard it before, we need to hear it again. So let me start at the first of the psalm.

[ 4 : 48 ] In fact, I'd like to read the entire psalm. The Lord is my shepherd. I'd love to just stop right there. The Lord is my shepherd.

I really think about it. Every word as you kind of begin this psalm is weighty. It's heavy with meaning. Not heavy as a burden, but heavy with encouragement and truth.

The Lord. Of course, the word Lord there is the translation of the most sacred name for God. Yahweh. Yahweh.

And who is he? He's my shepherd. Isn't that interesting? Yahweh, the great transcendent God, the God who created all things. He's my shepherd.

You know, to take the transcendent God and bring him down to earth. Really, he came down to earth to be my shepherd. So the Lord is my shepherd.

[ 5 : 52 ] I shall not want. I shall not want for anything. Everything I need more I have because the Lord is my shepherd.

And we're not to the sermon yet, okay? He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though. Here's the verse that we will focus on tonight. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

For thou art with me. You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a place before me in the presence of my enemies.

[ 6 : 57 ] Or prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. And you anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord. How long? Forever. Forever. Beautiful psalm. Just six verses. At least it's been divided into six verses.

David, when he wrote the psalm, didn't number the verses very likely. But they are very obvious stanzas or verses of a psalm.

And there are six of them. And really, we could camp out on just one verse at a time. And spend weeks, really, trying to delve into the depth of this psalm.

But what I want to focus on tonight is verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me.

[ 8 : 01 ] Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. That's the verse we want to focus on. Now, I mentioned that this is a life psalm. This is where the tire hits the road.

This is where our experience is. And therefore, this is where God assures us that he has provided for us in this life.

Regardless of what we face, no matter how hard things might be, whether it's hard personally, hard in the context of a family, hard in the context of a civilization, a society, a culture.

And really, it's all of the above for us these days. It's really because we all face some difficult things. We're believers. We're Christians.

We belong to God. And yet, God has not ever promised in his word that we would be somehow shielded from the difficulties of this life. He's not promised that we would somehow avoid those or that God would just keep those things away from us.

[ 9 : 12 ] In fact, the Bible is promised just the opposite. And so, we should not be surprised, not depressed, not discouraged, not despairing. Then, when the problems come, the hurtful things happen because the Bible says they're going to.

All right. Now, just knowing that is helpful. It's encouraging, but God gives us more than just the knowledge that this is just a common thing. This is just going to happen.

He gives us provision. And he gives us the provision right here in this psalm. Not just in this psalm, but in, you know, many places in Scripture, but in this psalm.

And really, in this one verse. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Every one of us are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. And by the way, David, in David's day, of course, David was a shepherd.

And in David's day, there was actually a place called the valley of the shadow of death.

Archaeologists tell us. And so, he was talking about a real place.

[ 10 : 17 ] And it was a dangerous place and a shadowy place. And it was a place that shepherds would lead their sheep through to take them to the greener grass when that was needed.

And they had to go through this shadowy, dangerous, kind of rocky, craggy place. Where there were all kinds of pitfalls that the sheep might fall into.

And there were thieves that would sometimes hide in some of these shadowy places. And they would steal the sheep. They would murder the shepherds.

And so, there was a real place. And it was a place that the shepherds in this part of the world, in David's world, according to geography, that the shepherds had to cross through in order to take care of their sheep.

And so, it's a real place. But it is representative of something that's very real, too. And that is this life and the dangers of this life and the hurts of this life.

[ 11 : 20 ] And we are all experiencing, we do experience, the valley of the shadow of death. Now, there are three things that I want to draw from this fourth verse.

Three things that should be an encouragement to every one of us, regardless of what's going on in your life right now. You may be on top of the world or think you are. And sometimes God allows us to, you know, be free of problems for a season.

You may be down in the lowest or think you're down in the lowest of pits. But there's a word for all of us here. Three things.

Three things we need to remember when we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We need to remember, first of all, God's program. God's program.

And what I mean is, yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, is it part of God's program for you? You say, well, that just, you know, that just doesn't make me too happy to think that God, I mean, doesn't God know what I'm going through?

[ 12 : 30 ] Are you telling me that what I'm going through right now, this hard thing in my life, this great loss in my life, that this is part of God's program? And I'm saying, yes, it is.

David said, yea, though. I mean, you see that, don't you? Yea, though. This is not a possibility. That is, the valley of the shadow of death is not just a possibility that some may experience.

It is something that will happen to every one of us. And it's part of God's program that we would go through our valleys.

Yea, though. This is what David said. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It's a sure thing. God has a plan. It's part of His program.

He has a purpose in this. And He desires to accomplish a number of things in our lives that we don't even yet know about yet. And we should not attempt to avoid it.

[ 13 : 37 ] Now, I'm not saying that when God gives us wisdom, you know, to not step a certain direction. You know, if God gives us wisdom that would get us out of a certain difficult time in our life, that we should not use that wisdom.

God provides those things. But the fact that we find ourselves walking through the valleys of the shadow of death, we should know that God has designed that. It's part of His program.

Now, some of those valleys we step into because we have made wrong decisions. I mean, let's just face up to that. I told these prisoners, these inmates at the prison that, you know, because quite frequently, you know, speak to some of these guys afterward.

And you hear the same kind of thing, that they got a raw deal, that somebody, you know, misrepresented them or that they were innocent, you know. And many of them don't take any personal responsibility.

And quite often in life, we have a tendency not to take personal responsibility. We make certain decisions and step certain directions. And we do things apart from God's will because we've not prayed or we've not trusted God in a certain decision in life.

[ 14 : 59 ] And so we find ourselves in the midst of a real problem. And it's one of our own making. And yet even that is still God's program. And isn't God a gracious God that He would allow us to make wrong steps so that we would find ourselves reaping the results, the fruit of our wrong decisions, so that we would realize that we need God and that we have strayed from Him.

And that would then bring us back to Him. God is gracious to allow us to make mistakes. We as parents have learned that, haven't we? Well, I think many parents have.

Some maybe have not these days. We have a tendency, some parents have a tendency to shield their kids from any possibility of wrong decisions. And when they make wrong decisions, they bail them out.

But a good parent will allow their children to gradually make decisions when they're ready and even allow them to make wrong decisions so that they can reap what they sow in order that they would come to the end of themselves and return back to God.

You can think of the story of the prodigal son, I think, is a prime example of that in the New Testament. And he eventually came to the end of himself. It's one of my favorite phrases in that entire parable that Jesus tells.

[ 16 : 26 ] He came to the end of himself. And so what did he do? He returned to the Father. All right, so this is part of God's program. Sometimes He allows us to walk through those valleys

because we have made decisions to go that direction.

Sometimes God directs us through those valleys so that He can teach us something and mature us. Sometimes He even leads us through hard places because He wants to protect us from another avenue that may be even more difficult.

And there are a number of reasons why God would allow us to go through the valleys of life, but they're a part of His program. Yay, though. Remember that. Yay, though.

That's not enough, of course, and that's why we have more to the verse. And so we not only need to remember God's program, but we need to also remember God's promise.

There's a promise here. In fact, there are a number of promises in this one verse in Psalm 23. And the promises are somewhat implied if we will just allow ourselves to think for a moment about everything that David said here.

[17:47] He described the valley of the shadow of death. In fact, I would suggest to you that there are four promises here. Remember, David said, yay, though.

That's God's program. It's a sure thing. He says, I walk through. And the word through is what keys you into the promises that he's about to share with us.

Through. That is, the valley is not a box canyon. It's not a pit. It's a valley. And by definition, a valley has an open end on the other end.

And so David is saying, yeah, yeah, I'm going to go through the valleys of the shadow of death. But there's an end to it. And the promise is I'm going to make it through it.

Now I want you to consider these four promises. Just as we think about what David said. As he kind of named this, quote, valley. In the first place, he called it a valley.

[18:49] And that's important. And we should remember this. Did you know that it is impossible to have a valley without mountains?

It's not possible to have a valley without mountains. It's not possible to have a low spot without two high spots. Not possible to have the valley without the mountaintops.

And Psalm 23 is the valley. I mentioned this at the beginning. It's the valley between two mountains. And the mountains are on each side of Psalm 23.

Psalm 22. Psalm 24. Psalm 22 is a mountain psalm. If we were to go back and look at that psalm, you would find that a number of things are in the psalm that directly correlate with some of the things that Jesus said.

Some of the things that were said and occurred at the cross. It's interesting when you look at it. The very things that Jesus said. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[19:58] This is in Psalm 22. Psalm 22. And the fact that the Romans parted his garments and they cast lots for his vesture, his clothes.

That's in Psalm 22. So Psalm 22 is, I call it a mountain psalm because it points to Mount Calvary. Where Jesus hung and died upon the cross.

On the other side of Psalm 23, you also have a mountain psalm. Psalm 24. In Psalm 24, it is really pointing us to what we could call Mount Zion and the return of Christ.

It's in Psalm 24 that you have these words toward the, well, verse 7, for example. Lift up your heads, O you gates, and lift you up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.

Who is the King of glory? The Lord, that's Yahweh, strong and mighty. The Lord, mighty in battle.

And then it repeats it. Lift up your heads, O you gates.

[21:01] See, this is a mountain psalm. It's Mount Zion and the coming of our Lord. And Psalm 23 is the valley between these two mountains.

And so when we find ourselves in the valley, we ought to understand you can't have valleys without mountains. And we should, as the Bible says, look to the hills from where comes our help.

We can look to the blood-soaked slopes of Mount Calvary where Jesus died for us. We can look to the sunlit peaks of Mount Zion where Jesus is coming again for us.

He died for us. He is coming again for us. And so you cannot have a valley without mountains. And Psalm 23 is the valley between two mountains.

Psalm 23 represents the life, our life here in the valley. But we're surrounded by mountains and we look to the mountains.

[22:03] Also, he speaks of a shadow. He says, the valley of the shadow of death. And certainly you know that you cannot have a shadow without light.

Is it possible to have a shadow without light? Not at all. And so, who is the light? Well, the Lord, Jesus Christ.

He said, I am the light of the world. Now, let me ask you something. When you are facing the light, where is the shadow? It's behind you. Now, if you are turned away from the light, where is the shadow?

It's in front of you. It's before you. If we will keep our eyes and our faces and our devotion and our commitment, our yearning, our desires toward Jesus at all times, then when the shadow comes, it will always be behind us.

Our focus will be the light. You cannot have a shadow without light. Then he says, the valley of the shadow of death, you cannot have death without life.

[ 23 : 20 ] It's not possible to have the concept of death without there also being the concept of life. And Jesus is our life. Regardless of the valley.

Regardless of how dark that valley is. Or how deep that valley is. Now, if the Lord is your shepherd, and that's the key, isn't it? If the Lord is your shepherd, then no matter how dark and deep and deadly the valley, He is always our life.

He is our life. Always remember that. This is the promise. God's promise for the valleys. You cannot have a valley without mountains.

Cannot have shadows without light. You cannot have death without life. And you cannot have evil without a greater good.

Do you see? He says, the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. You cannot have evil without a greater good. And who is that greater good?

[ 24 : 31 ] It's Jesus, of course. He is the good shepherd, remember. He is the good shepherd. In Psalm 23, it's all about the good shepherd. What does the good shepherd do?

Hmm? Hmm? He gives His life for the sheep. You cannot have evil without a greater good. All right, so we have God's program.

Remember God's program for the valleys. It's His program that we should walk through the valleys of the shadow of death and that we should not fear any evil.

And then remember God's promise. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, regardless of the valley.

And then one more. Remember God's presence. And this really caps it all off, doesn't it? You are with me. What David said.

[ 25 : 33 ] You are with me. Where? In the valley. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

With me. And then He adds this. Your rod and your staff. He mentions the rod and the staff. They shall comfort me.

They shall care for me. That's interesting, the rod and the staff. And these are obviously instruments of the shepherd. And those who have studied Middle Eastern shepherding, especially in the day in which David lived, and really this is still going on, virtually unchanged in our day today. But the shepherd basically had two instruments that he would use in order to take care of his flock. He would have a rod and he would have a staff.

I'm sorry to leave you ladies out. They were probably lady shepherds too. You know, I don't know. These are the two instruments of the shepherd. And the shepherd would hand make these instruments that he would use in taking care of his flock.

[ 26 : 55 ] The rod was relatively short. And what the shepherd would do would be to find a small tree. And he would cut it off about so high off the ground.

Maybe a little higher. So it would be about that long. And he would dig all the roots out of it. And then trim off the loose part of the root system.

So that he had a stick about so long and a kind of a root ball on the end of it. And he would smooth that out. And sometimes they would take pieces of rock.

And they would insert pieces of rock. And hammer in even pieces of metal and bone. And all for the purposes of waiting the end of that rod.

And he would use the rod for a number of purposes. One of them, it was a tool for protection. He would practice throwing that thing.

[ 27 : 59 ] And when a wolf would come or other animals that would try to lead away the sheep or even try to kill them, he would throw that rod.

And he got to be very accurate with that thing. And could even kill another animal with that rod. He also used it when he had a straying sheep from time to time.

Because sheep are always prone to stray. And sometimes a sheep would just get into a habit of straying. And eventually the shepherd would take that sheep, that little lamb, take his rod and hold out one of its legs.

And he would break the leg of the sheep. So it would cripple the sheep for a time. But then he would bind up that leg. And then while that leg was healing, the shepherd would carry the sheep on his shoulders.

You've kind of seen pictures of that with a lamb over the neck and shoulders of the shepherd as he's walking along with his entire flock. And he would hold and carry that sheep until it was healed and was able to walk by itself.

[ 29 : 11 ] And then strangely, not really strangely when you think about it, when he would finally put that sheep down, that little sheep would stay right by the shepherd. It would never stray again.

And so that was what the rod was. It was a rod to protect and to discipline the sheep. And then he had the staff. And we've all seen pictures of this.

You know, the shepherd's crook. And he would also find a small tree. This time cut it off right at the ground and cut it up high.

And then he would fashion a crook in the thing by heating it up over a fire, over coals. And he would eventually shape that thing so it had a crook in the end of it.

And then when one of his sheep would stray or fall down into a little pit or something, then he could reach that shepherd's crook down in there and grab it just under its chest and pull it up to safety.

[ 30 : 11 ] Or as they're walking along and the sheep are there and they're coming to maybe a place where they need to turn or a tight spot, he would take that shepherd's crook, the staff, and just kind of tap on the side of the sheep on the outside and this side.

Or if he wanted to turn them, he could direct them and guide them with his shepherd's staff. And it's just really, really, really neat how the shepherd would use these two tools.

The rod, we could say the rod of correction and protection. And we could say the staff of direction as well as protection.

And some of them would have, they would have multiple uses. And so the shepherd would use the rod and the staff to care for the sheep, to comfort the sheep. At night when the shepherd would bring the sheep, his flock, into the fold, which would be kind of an enclosure that would have an opening just on one side, bring them in for the night.

He would actually count the sheep as they were coming in because the closure would just be large enough for one sheep to come through at a time. And he would count them and examine them.

[ 31 : 23 ] And he would take his rod and kind of lay it over the top of the back of each sheep and which would part the wool. And so he could look in there at the skin and see if there were parasites or sores that needed to be tended to.

And he just used these tools for a number of reasons, all of them to care for the sheep. And so you can see the perfect comparison or analogy here that our shepherd, he cares for his sheep, for you, for me.

Even though we're going through the valley of the shadow of death, we don't have to fear the evil because he's the greater good. And his rod and staff, they're used to comfort us, to care for us, to nurture us, to protect us and do all that is needed for the sheep.

Now, I know that there are times in the valleys when you're so in the darkness of it that you can't even see the shepherd. But he's there, always there.

If he is your Lord, that is, if you belong to him through faith in him as your Lord and Savior, you've been born again, you're one of the sheep of his fold, then you can be sure that the shepherd has never abandoned you, never, regardless of what you face.

[ 33 : 00 ] And he is caring for you and guiding you and directing you. And even though it seems like things are totally out of control at times, he still has a purpose and he's moving you along according to that purpose.

And so we should trust him. We should always trust him. It's a good time to visit this truth here at the end of the year, the beginning of a new one, especially when we begin to think about the beginning of a new year.

And what is in store for us this year? What will the valleys be like? And maybe the valley I'm in right now is going to extend on into this next year.

And we could think of all kinds of dark and gloomy scenarios and become fearful, but we should not be fearful. Because, yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will not fear evil, because the shepherd is with us.

And his rod and his staff are designed to comfort us and to care for us. Remember these things. Thank you.