



José Abenchuchan
Deaf Missions
Council Bluffs, Iowa

Series: Perseverance

Sermon: 4 of 5

Date: July 22, 2007

TRUST AND FAITH

Hello. We will continue our series on perseverance. That means to endure and remain faithful in Him. Before I go ahead with my lesson, please watch *The Bible: American Sign Language Translation of Psalm 23*.

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Today we will focus on verse 4. That verse says, *"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."*

Once again, I envision David as a shepherd leading a flock of sheep through a dark valley. The sheep are scared as they see the dark sides. Wild animals are nearby looking at the sheep. As the sheep walk through the valley, they notice the bones of dead animals on the ground, frightened by the skulls they see. This shows them that other animals have been killed as they walked through this valley. The shepherd tells the scared sheep to continue following him. This is a picture of fear. Fear is a strong word. I know we have all experienced fear.

This verse encourages us not to be afraid. We must remember not to fear because God is with us. Sometimes we may say that we believe in God, but when we face problems in life we become afraid. We forget about God and become distracted. We must learn to truly acknowledge that God is with us. We must acknowledge this in both our minds and hearts. We must know that God is with us no matter what happens.

Sometimes we become weak because of different reasons. One example is sins we face in our own lives. As we go about life, we sometimes face struggles and problems and wonder where God is. We wonder why our lives are messed up. We feel like God is punishing us. The devil causes us to feel like this. The devil tells us, "See...I told you, your life is messed up. God is not with you. He left you because of the sins you've committed. God is punishing you now. That's why you are facing problems in your life. It's your responsibility."

Sometimes the devil puts these thoughts in our minds and we believe him. But those thoughts are not true; they are false! If the devil puts those thoughts in our mind, including that we have sinned, we need to respond with, "Yes, I have sinned. I am a sinner just like everyone else."

My point is that we know God loves us so much that His Son was willing to give up His life on the cross for our sins. Our sins have been forgiven. We do not need to feel overwhelmed because of our sins, because we have problems and are messed up. Don't let the devil convince you to feel weak and give up your relationship with God. We must tell the devil that no matter what happens, God is always with us. Trust Him to lead you out of your problems. Keep your faith and stand strong!

We often know when we've done something wrong. When this happens, you should simply pray to God, confess to Him that you are a sinner, and tell Him you are sorry. After praying, stand strong knowing that He will be touched and forgive you. Then move on with life and don't dwell on it or feel guilty. Have faith in Him.

We must remember that David made many mistakes in his life. Do you remember the story of David being attracted to Bathsheba? Bathsheba was a beautiful woman taking a bath outside. David was tempted. He slept with her and had her husband killed. Later, David repented. He still had a relationship with God, even after committing terrible sins. This story of David shows us that no matter how awful our sins are, if we repent, ask God for forgiveness, and change our lives, He will forgive us. Our relationship with Him will be restored. One way to prevent the devil from putting fear in us is to firmly acknowledge that God is always with us no matter what.

We are often afraid of the dark. You may remember as a child being afraid of the dark and asking your mother to turn on a light to help you feel better. We are afraid of the dark because we cannot see. Death or darkness can represent different problems in life such as being laid off from your job because of budget cuts and worrying that you will not be able to pay the bills including rent and car payments. Worried that you and your wife will wonder how you will live because you can't see the future, you have fear of what will happen in your future. Darkness can represent marriage problems. Even though you're trying to solve problems with your wife, your marriage seems to be falling apart. It seems like there is no hope. You feel like you can't save the marriage. You're afraid the bond will be broken. Darkness can represent your own children backsliding in their faith in God. You try so hard, yet your children continue to rebel. You start to worry about what might happen to your children and become afraid.

Fear. Fear. Fear. As long as we remain with God, we do not need to fear. We need to trust Him that everything will be okay. We must have faith and know in our hearts and minds that He is with us.

In Matthew 14, Jesus encourages others to not be afraid. He sends people out in a boat on a lake. This happened after Jesus did the miracle of feeding 5,000 people, beginning with only two fish and five loaves of bread. Jesus' followers had witnessed His power on display

and were amazed. After Jesus told the people to go home, he told His followers to get in a boat and go out on the lake. Jesus also told them He would meet them later out on the lake. Jesus went up and prayed. The followers obeyed Jesus. They got into a boat. As they sailed, it became very windy and the waves were very high. They struggled with their boat. As Jesus was praying, He knew what was happening. Then, He walked towards the boat on the water. As the followers were struggling, they saw Jesus walking towards them, panicked, and said to each other, "It's a ghost!"

Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. It is I, Jesus."

One of the followers, Peter, said, "If it is you, Jesus, tell me it is okay to walk on water to you."

Jesus answered, "Come."

At first, Peter bravely got out of the boat and walked on the water towards Jesus, keeping his eyes on Jesus. Then, he looked away from Jesus and noticed the wind and the rough waves hitting the boat. As he looked away from Jesus, he began to sink and cried to Jesus for help. Jesus reached out to Peter with His hands.

Let's look at Matthew 14:27. You will notice before Peter got out of the boat Jesus knew they were afraid. Verse 27 says, *"But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"* After Peter heard this, he had courage and walked to Jesus. His eyes were fixed on Jesus. But when he looked away from Jesus, the fear of the wind and water overwhelmed him. He began to sink. Then in verse 31, *"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'"*

Often our faith becomes weak because of fear. We allow fear to overwhelm us. When we face problems in life, we need to keep our eyes fixed on our Shepherd. We know that wherever He goes, we will follow. Once we become distracted by problems in life, we will start experiencing fear. Keep your eyes on Jesus no matter what. Remember Jesus is always with us and He will lead us through the valley of darkness. And even if we may stray, we must continue our best to follow Jesus. He will lead us out of the valley and we will be okay. This is the secret – to keep your eyes fixed upon Jesus.

You are not the only one who experiences fear. I experience fear, too. When this happens, I train myself to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus. Remember when Jesus told His followers to go in a boat before He went to pray? Do you think Jesus did not know that there would be a storm? Did Jesus not know that Peter would walk on water and then sink? Do you think Jesus did not know? Oh, Jesus knew all of those things would happen. But, Jesus encouraged these things to happen so that His followers would learn to deal with challenges.

Jesus knows about all the struggles and challenges we will face in life. So, why do we worry? If we worry, it means we forgot to trust in Jesus. Jesus already knows what will happen. As He leads us, we need to have faith and trust in Him. We will see His power and work through His hands leading us through and out of problems in our lives. Again, I want to

emphasize keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. You will be amazed at how much easier life will be. That's good news. He has promised that if you keep your eyes on Him, you will be fine.

I want to emphasize that when you are afraid you should say, "Jesus is with me. I should not worry." We should say this. If we don't say this, thoughts of "what if" will fill our minds. We will become weak. Thoughts of "do not worry" and prayer will help us remember that God is with us. Self-encouraging words such as "do not worry, I am fine, I am all right, God is with me and will make everything okay" will help you remain focused on Jesus and get out of your situation.

It is important for you to know that no matter what you face in life, Jesus knows exactly what you need. Jesus knows we must face difficult challenges in our lives for spiritual growth to happen. As we overcome struggles, our faith will become stronger and we will realize His power.

There are some interesting examples in nature. A bird gives birth to an egg. After the baby has fully developed within the egg, it is ready to come out. In order to get out, it must peck and break the eggshell to get out. It must take time and struggle to crack the egg open and get out. Do you know what will happen if we decide to help the baby bird by taking apart the shell? The baby bird will be too weak to survive. We must allow the baby bird to struggle as part of its development, and when it finally gets out of the shell, it will be strong enough to survive. That's why, when we struggle, Jesus encourages us to fight so that our faith builds up and becomes strong.

The same is true for butterflies. They start as a "worm." Then they build a cocoon around themselves. They stay in the cocoon until it is the right time. The butterfly will work hard and struggle to get itself out of the cocoon. If we decide to get a knife and cut open the cocoon so the butterfly has an easier time getting out, the butterfly will be weak when it gets out and will eventually die. We must leave the butterfly alone and let it struggle out of the cocoon. Then, when it gets out, it will be strong enough to fly away. It's the same with us. We need to fight through our struggles so that our faith may build up and become strong.

A rod and staff are both important when working with sheep. We may grow through His rod and staff. His rod helps discipline us, matures us, and helps us grow strong. I know that we sometimes fail. That's why we need His staff. When a sheep falls into a hole, a shepherd will use his staff to pull the sheep out of the hole. In the Bible story, when Peter sank into the water, Jesus quickly grabbed Peter's hand. Jesus' arms were like a staff. He used his arm to pull Peter out of the water.

God is wise. He knows what we need. He is our shepherd and knows us in His heart. He will support us and help us grow strong. James 1:2-4 says, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance...*" It is not always easy to live a Christian life. We always have a lot to learn, especially about depending on Him. We need to understanding that His rod and staff help

us grow and become strong with Him, our Shepherd. He can lead us to a place where we can experience eternal life with joy knowing He has conquered death. Now, we are in the valley of darkness with the goal of arriving into our eternal home in heaven.

This is exciting! Our purpose on earth is living for heaven. We may keep our faith in Him by going to church, fellowship, supporting others, praying, reading the Bible, and following Him through good and bad times. When you get to heaven and look back upon your life, you will realize it was all worth it. You will shout with joy and praise God forever. That should be our goal in life. Do you have that goal? If so, we share the same goal, same faith, and same passion for the Lord. Let us support and encourage one another as we see the day approaching. God bless you.



©2007 Deaf Missions

This printed manuscript is the English translation of a sermon presented in American Sign Language.

The sermon may be viewed at www.linkasl.com. LINK is a ministry of Deaf Missions..

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permissions of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Deaf Missions, 21199 Greenview Road, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503 • www.deafmissions.com