Whispers – Part 1

# In the Valleys

# (Job 26:14)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. As we’re beginning this new message series, I’m going to talk about what it means in a practical sense that the word became flesh, that God is with us. Now that we’ve passed Thanksgiving and the Christmas season is upon us, the reality is that Christmas can be a difficult time, a time when many need encouragement, and so we’re going to focus on the meaning of Christmas. You see, this time of year is not really about Christmas presents, but it’s about God’s Christmas presence as the Bible clearly states,

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

It’s that message of Christmas that becomes even more practical for those who’ve experienced loss, for those who are hurting and lonely. And so, this time of year is a great opportunity to bring the gift of encouragement to someone who’s struggling. And that’s what I hope to do with this message series, the title for this series is “Whispers” and today I want to encourage you, talking about embracing the presence of God in the valleys. You see, the Bible assures us, and this is really the message of Christmas, that God will be with you, God will help you, and God will strengthen you. And so, it’s this child, the Christ, the son of God, who is God with us.

Now, in the world today there are all kinds of misconceptions about God and many of them are just pure speculation coming from sources outside of the Bible, and yet so many times we find ourselves wondering why we’re discouraged when so much of what’s impressed upon our hearts and minds comes from the media, television shows, movies, and our culture itself, but the Bible tells us,

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

And so, there’s so much more that we haven’t heard, seen, or understood this side of eternity; but God has revealed himself from the beginning of time. It’s these things revealed to us that we could say are whispers in the spectrum of eternity. In fact, Job says this in chapter 26,

“How faint the whisper we hear of him" (Job 26:14).

And maybe this morning you can relate to Job, because it’s easy to believe that God is with us when things are going well. You know, when you get good news, when you get a raise, when your car passes its emissions test… the first time. You know, when things are going well and you’re on the mountaintop, it’s easy to acknowledge, “God is with me.” But it’s so much more difficult when you’re in the valley, when things aren’t going the way you want them to, when you get bad news and you’re hurting. It actually seems like it’s more difficult to hear his voice and sense the presence of God when you’re alone in the valley of sorrow, fear, depression, and anxiety. And yet, when you’re in the valley, God still whispers just like he did on the mountaintop. In fact, in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, chapter one, verse one tells us,

“Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son…” (Hebrews 1:1-2, New Living Translation).

And so, God isn’t silent, he has, and he continues to speak at different times and in different ways about the mysteries of life, salvation, and eternity. He’s revealed himself and the radiance of his glory through his son Jesus Christ, and he is "God with us". He hasn’t remained distant, far off, or shrouded in mystery, but he’s revealed himself from the very beginning. The Bible tells us,

“Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

But even beyond the revelation of intelligent design, beyond creation, beyond the glory revealed to the prophets, in these last days he’s spoken to us by his Son. Not just in a whisper, but at times loudly and clearly, because he is “God with us,” and so if you lean in, you can’t miss it, it’s unmistakable. Yet, maybe last week you had family over, you were anticipating a perfect day when suddenly you found yourself walking through the valley. You know, you sensed God’s presence, but then someone you love got bad news, a son or daughter is making poor decisions, your employer told you that after the holidays you’re going to lose your job. And suddenly tragedy comes and attempts to steal your joy, everything that you’ve been hoping for, and so some of you need a word of encouragement this morning. Here it is, number one, when you’re in the valley you can embrace the presence of God because he will be with you.

## 1. God Is with You

The thing that’s interesting is that our experience of God, our perspective of God changes depending upon whether we’re on the mountaintop or in the valley. In fact, you may really enjoy God on the mountaintops, when things are going well, but you’ll actually experience him in greater ways when you’re in the valley. You see, as you read the Bible, you find that valleys represent several things. Valleys are often where battles take place. Valleys could be seasons of desperation and loneliness, but they’re also times of spiritual growth, because you get to know God intimately in the valleys. And so today, I want to share with you a passage from the Psalms that I believe will help you to understand where God is, what he’s saying, and what he’s doing when you’re in the valley. I believe these three verses in Psalm chapter 84 have the potential to impact your spiritual life in a profound life-changing way. Here’s what the psalmist said, verse five,

"What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. They will continue to grow stronger and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem” (Psalm 84:5-7, NLT).

The New Living Translation calls it the Valley of Weeping, because the Valley of Baca literally means the Valley of weeping or lamentation. Bible scholars say that this Valley is likely named after a species of tree in Palestine that would ooze out sap, dripping drops as if tears, and therefore was a reference to a valley where pilgrims would pass by on the way to Jerusalem. And so, this valley is a lonely place, a dangerous place, a difficult place, but the psalmist promises that God will be with you saying,

“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord” (Psalms 84:5, NLT).

You see, this is important, because some of you are going through that lonely place, that difficult place, or dangerous place right now. But if you’re a follower of Christ, if you know God intimately, you have a joy that goes beyond your circumstances. David said, “Joyful are those who obey his laws and search for him with all their hearts” (Psalms 119:2, NLT). And you also have a strength that goes beyond your own physical strength. That’s what the psalmist was saying, when you’re overwhelmed, when you’ve had enough, and you get to the end of your strength, you have access to a heavenly strength, because God will be with you. And that’s why the apostle Paul could say with such confidence,

“Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

You see, the apostle Paul knew that he was created to depend upon God, that Christ’s power is made perfect in his weakness, and so, if you're in the middle of a valley right now, you literally have access to the very real, ever present power of God who promises to be with you. God will be with you, he’s available, and ready to assist you in your time of need. And number two, God will help you.

## 2. God Will Help You

God will help you, and so, let’s look at what the psalmist says. I just love the way the New Living Translation sets this up. You see, we may be in the valley, but let’s dig in a little further. Verse five says,

"What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord, (who’ve set what?) who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem” (Psalm 84:5, NLT).

And so, we may be in the valley, but we’re just passing through, because we’re on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, we’ve got our minds on the city of Peace. That’s what the Bible calls this city in Genesis chapter 14, when King Melchizedek blessed Abram (vs. 18). The New Testament tells us in Hebrews chapter 7, that this Melchizedek was king of Salem and…

“His name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace” (Hebrews 7:2).

In other words, sometimes you’ve got to push through a little bit of pain, that lonely and desolate place, to get through to the peace of God. You see, it’s the valley that’s the pathway to the place of peace, but we’ve set our minds toward God, we’re on a pilgrimage to the place of peace.

The apostle Paul knew that what you think about matters, and so, he wrote about this in Romans, Philippians, and again in Colossians where he said,

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:2).

You see, this is so important, because you may be in the Valley of weeping, and where you are is one thing, but what you’re thinking about us something else. Right now, you may be in the deepest darkest valley, but your mind can still be set upon God. Your heart might be racing, your soul might be aching, your emotions may be battling, and there just may be so much to do, but God will help you. Look with me at verse six,

"When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings” (Psalm 84:6, NLT).

And so, this morning, you may be wondering how you're going to pay for Christmas, you may be facing great tragedies, difficulties in the valley, but your mind can be set on the goodness of God, because he will be with you. He promised, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). God has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

And so, you may be in the Valley, but your mind is set on the peace of God. You may be walking through the Valley of Weeping, but the valley is not your destination. You’re just passing through, you’re on a pilgrimage, you’re on the way to the place of peace. And so, you can find comfort, you can be encouraged like David did knowing that God will help you, he’s with you, and he’ll get you through this. That’s what he said,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalms 23:1).

And so, today you may be in a difficult place, a dark place. It may be painful, you may be hurting right now, but you’re just passing through the Valley of Weeping. God’s going to help you, he’s going to get you through, you’re on a pilgrimage, the place of peace is just up ahead, but the way is through the Valley. And I love this next phrase, as they pass through the Valley of Weeping verse six says,

“It will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings" (Psalm 84:6).

The literal translation says, “Passing through the Valley of Baca they make it a spring”. In other words, it’s less passive, because you’re a participant, you’re in a dry place, and so you dig a well. You prepare a place, a container for the provision, for the blessings that God is sending. As your passing through, you make room for the provision of God. He’s with you, he’ll help you, and number three, God will strengthen you.

## 3. God Will Strengthen You

And so, it’s as you’re in that barren place, that dry place, that lonely valley, that you dig a hole, you make a spring, preparing the way for the provision of God. You make a well, and I know it hasn't rained yet, there’s not a cloud in sight, but like Abraham told his son Isaac, "God himself will provide the lamb” (Genesis 22:8). Like Elisha told the widow, “Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side" (2 Kings 4:4). And it’s as if God is saying to you today, “You show me your faith, you set your mind on pilgrimage, you fix your focus on meeting with me, the King of Peace, you dig a well and I’ll show you my faithfulness.”

You see, you may be tired, you may be hurting, you may have lost hope, you’re in the Valley of weeping, but God will strengthen you. He said to a man with a shriveled hand, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and it was completely restored” (Matthew 12:13). There was a man, an invalid who couldn't walk, he’d been sick for 38 years, and the Bible tells us in John chapter 5, Jesus asked him,

“Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me..." Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked” (John 5:6-9).

You see, God will strengthen you. You just start digging that well, stretch out your hand, get up, pick up your mat and walk. You show him your faith and he’ll show you his faithfulness. If you pray, he’ll reveal himself. The Bible promises in James chapter 4,

"Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8).

You see, you may be here, you may be hearing the sound of my voice, and you haven't sensed the presence of God in a long time. And yet, you need to know that God will strengthen you, it’s time to dig a ditch, it’s time to step out in faith, because the Bible says,

“The Lord is near to all who call on him” (Psalms 145:18).

It's time to make a pilgrimage, to set our minds on worshiping God, seeking his presence, because we need a fresh encounter with God. You see, God’s been whispering, “What joy for those who strength comes from the Lord”. And some of you today, it’s time to prepare, God’s been whispering, “Would you dig a well in the Valley, in the wilderness, in that lonely place?” In second Kings chapter 3, God told the people to “Make this valley full of ditches”, and verse 20 says,

“The next morning… there it was — water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water” (2 Kings 3:20).

You see, it’s as you seek him, that you’ll find him. As you pray, he’ll listen. As you draw near to him, he’ll draw near to you. He’s been whispering, “I will be with you, I will help you, and I will strengthen you.” God will meet with you in the Valley of weeping, because that’s where we get to know him intimately, and he promised that you wouldn’t have to go through the Valley alone. And so, it’s as we walk through the Valley of weeping, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, that place of peace, the Bible says in verse seven,

“They will continue to grow stronger and each of them will appear before God…” (Psalm 84:7).

You see, it’s our strength that comes from the Lord, and it’s as we set our minds on a pilgrimage to encounter God, as we get to know his peace, that we’ll continue to grow stronger, but it’s not our strength, it’s a strength that comes from the Lord. It’s his strength! God strengthens us to climb up out of the Valley, back up the mountain, and so we can praise him in the Valley, because we’re just passing through; we're going to that place of peace.

This morning you may be feeling weak, but it’s in that place, in your weakness, that the psalmist tells us,

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1).

When you're in the darkness, deep in the Valley, God is there, for the Bible tells us, “The light shines in the darkness” (John 1:5). And Jesus said, he is our light in the darkness, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

When you're in a Valley of trouble, Jesus tells us, “In me you may have peace… take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And that’s why James could say, “Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials” (James 1:2). And so, we can join with the psalmist saying,

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever “ (Psalms 73:26).

He is our joy in the Valley of trouble, our comforter in the middle of our pain, our counselor, and our everlasting strength. God will be with you, God will help you, and God will strengthen you when you feel like you can’t handle anymore.

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