

THE FOLLOWING SERMON WAS PREACHED
IN THE LEICHHARDT WESLEY MISSION IN 1971
WHILE I WAS AN ACCREDITED LAY PREACHER

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Title: “Finding God In Your Shadows”

Reading: Song of Solomon Chapter 2

Text: Song of Solomon 2:3

“I sat down under His shadow with great delight
and His fruit was sweet to my taste”.

INTRODUCTION:

These words found in that beautiful love Song of Solomon, are symbolic of the Christian’s sheer delight at the wonderful Love of God made real to us in the life and teachings of JESUS CHRIST.

Middle Eastern writers have made frequent use of the word “Shadows” – because they have had to rely a lot on the protection of shadows – from the heat of the sun. For them, a shadow as something to be appreciated.

In the Western world, we are more inclined to relate to shadows with a sense of gloom: for example – A person’s life becomes overshadowed with fear – A negative thought.

Frankly - shadows and their effects fascinate me. They add enrichment to my world!

One Sunday, seated in an old church building, some time ago, during a “Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Program”, I became interested in the many contrasting shadows caused by the sunlight reflecting through the side windows. They seemed to add beauty to the sacred setting of this place.

Then without warning, a dark cloud blotted out the sunlight for awhile, and the whole building became overshadowed with gloom, despite the delightful presentation of the Program – and this intrigued me.

Human experience is so full of many ‘wonderful shadows and this makes life very interesting - it enables one to evaluate and appreciate our varying situations.

Sometimes, however, a shadow of gloom is cast over our experience, and we lose our sense of joy;
we lose our sense of judgement;
we lose our sense of God’s presence; - and
we find that life has become a struggle.

This is something that confronts us ALL at various times, and with varying degrees of intensity. How then are we going to maintain a MENTAL, a PHYSICAL and a SPIRITUAL stability in situations such as these?

The answer is GOD: – find God in your shadows. He’s the only One who knows; He’s the only One who cares, and understands. Of course you must face up to your shadows you must come to know

what they really are: and to help you, I am going to suggest THREE SOURCES from which these shadows come and cause you so much discomfort – so much anxiety and fear.

(1) SHADOWS OF THE PAST: Past experiences – past trouble – past failure – past guilt, and past loss.

During a discussion with a schoolmaster one day, he said to me, “We are the sum of our past experiences”. I am more inclined to think, ‘We are the sum of what we DO with our past experiences’.

One day I talked with someone whom I had not seen for a long time: we talked for awhile about business; then somehow the conversation drifted to conscience.

“My conscience troubles me”, he said: “If only my past could be written on a slate and wiped off - I would have peace of mind”. My thoughts, strangely enough, went to the words of Omah Khayyam:-

“The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on: nor all thy piety or wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line; nor all thy tears wash out a word of it”.

There is nothing that we can do to erase our past – But God can – He can – and He has reminded us of this:-

(Isaiah 44:22): “I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions”

(Micah 7:19): “I will cast their sins into the depths of the sea”

(Jeremiah 31:34): “I will remember their sins no more - I will forgive their iniquity”

How we thank God for those words!

When a friend said to me, that he could not understand why the shadow of some past experience should suddenly cause him so much unrest; I asked myself the question: “What causes shadows — Do you know what causes shadows?”

Charles Churchill wrote:-

“Every shadow owes its birth to light”

So then, there could be no shadows without LIGHT and there could be no shadows without something standing in the way of light. And while some past experience still stands between yourself and God, unconfessed, unforgiven, unsundered: its shadow will darken your pathway here and there through your life. But each time; God is standing in your shadow, waiting to help you: waiting to forgive you: waiting to MAKE A NEW PERSON of you: if you would only let go and let God have His way.

The Old Testament is rich with instances of GOD, standing in the shadows revealing Himself. Why! Jacob found God in this way – in a very real way! He had wronged his brother Esau, then fled for his life. Now – more than 20 years later he is afraid: his brother Esau is approaching, and with him, he has 400 men.

First – Jacob sought to appease his brother’s anger, by sending gifts to him – arranged in such a way as to appear much bigger than they really were.

Then that night, after he had settled his family down, he forded the river to a place where he could be alone. And under the pressure of his anxiety, fighting his troubles – the story tells us that a man appeared – and Jacob wrestled with that man all through the night.

No – it was not Esau with whom he wrestled — it was no mortal man — God was his aggressor – seeking to drive Jacob from his reliance on his lower means, to the greatest blessing of all – FAITH IN THE LIVING GOD.

But Jacob resisted - that is, until he was rendered powerless; and realising his helplessness, he clung to his opponent and said; “I will not let you go till you bless me”.

God did bless Jacob, and gave him a new name. He was no longer Jacob the cheat - but ISRAEL, a prince with God. Now there was no more scheming - no more double talk – he was a new man – and that dreaded meeting with his brother, became one of embracing and forgiveness. You see, it was all in God’s hands now - God was there, in his shadow.

“I sat down under His shadow with great delight
and His fruit was sweet to my taste”.

(2) SHADOWS OF THE FUTURE: Insecurity and death.

The scriptures teach us to trust God and live a day at a time — to HAVE FAITH IN HIM.

John Bunyan, in his “Pilgrim’s Progress”, tells how that Christian, on his way to the Celestial City, was met by two men – Mistrust and Timorous who were running away, because they were afraid of their future.

“Turn back”, they shouted as they fled, “Turn back – there’s lions ahead”.

Oh, how often have we felt like turning back because we were afraid of some situation – some difficulty, or some problem that lays ahead?

A feeling of insecurity swept over Christian as he moved on — and a short way from achievement – a short distance from the Porter’s Lodge where he would receive his Christian armour, he heard those lions in the distance – he heard their roar. Fear gripped him: “If I turn back”, he thought, “I will lose what I have struggled to gain – yet if I go forward, I will die”.

Courageously he decided to go on – and at that moment the Porter called out, “DON’T BE AFRAID, THE LIONS ARE CHAINED”!

God stands in your shadow of fear and insecurity and calls out, “Don’t be afraid, the lions are chained” – “Lo I am with you always” – “I will never leave you or forsake you”.

Yet, despite these comforting words, people, looking into the future are overshadowed by the fear of death! –

— DON’T BE AFRAID. —

David, who trod the same path, was able to sing; *“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me – I am comforted”*.

When the Late King George VI, lay on his bed dying, it was said “He walked with DEATH and a FRIEND and when death came, he walked with his FRIEND”.

Oh, learn to walk with God, NOW, and when death comes, you will not be strangers as He meets you in the shadows; to continue that walk to His house of ‘many mansions’ of which our Saviour spoke. Such love is so wonderful that “I sat down under His shadow with great delight and His fruit was sweet to my taste”

(3) THE SHADOW OF THE PRESENT: Perplexity and confusion.

Luke 21:25 tells us “There will come upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity”. So – we have been warned.

Now, your situation at this moment may be so pressing, that there seems to be no way out: there seems to be no answer: and well you may ask, “What shall I do?” — It is not always easy to make a decision.

If you are finding it difficult to face a situation in your life – about love about friendship about loyalty – the home, business matters — God stands in your shadow waiting to help you. – And don’t be overwhelmed by the way you may find God in your shadows – we are each affected in a different way.

Isaiah, during a time of national crisis, saw the Lord in the shadow of his trouble; and he was so full of pessimism – of frustration and despondency – when he saw God, he said, “*Woe is me for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips – I am no good!*” And just when it seemed that all was lost – God came to Isaiah and said, “Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is cleansed”.

Oh, it is always God who moves first! God always takes the initiative. Isn’t this seen in the parable of the “Prodigal Son”, who, while he was seeking his father and forgiveness — his father was already scanning the dusty road – SEEKING HIS LOST SON.

So it is, that God steps out to meet you in your situation – and the place where God and man – God and woman meet, is the place of reconciliation – the place of love.

But how are you going to recognise God in your shadows – when your eyes have been blinded with tears – and your heart is torn by fear and frustration?

— I’LL TELL YOU HOW —

He came into this world that we might know Him,
He dwelt among us, living our lives,
Sharing our troubles, entering our sorrows, bearing our burdens.
He identified Himself with humanity
at every point of the way. — Oh it was costly.

Isaiah 53:3 says, “He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him” — But it was costlier still. One hymn writer paints a picture for us of the price that was paid.

*“There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the Dear Lord was crucified;
Who died to save us all”.*

But He rose again from the dead, as a living proof of His power to conquer sin and death. Therefore, standing somewhere in your shadows, you will find Him, you will know Him by the nail prints in His hands.

People everywhere are finding the reality of God in their shadows to be far beyond all that they could have imagined; all because of Him who said:-

“Come unto Me all you who are weary and overburdened, and I will give you rest. Put My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls”. (Matthew 11:28). And again - “Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out”.

“I sat down under His shadow with great delight
and His fruit was sweet to my taste”.

God grant that you may find Him this morning, in the shadow of your sin, your fear your loss the pressure of life or the lengthening shadows of your life as you draw near to the setting sun.

AMEN