

Psalm 23

## Cling to What You Know

Just three months ago our government made misleading promises to never again impose lockdowns and never bring in vaccine passports.

These promises all vaporized just a few weeks ago with the announcement of renewed restrictions, mandatory injections, and the requirement of a passport.

As a result, suddenly many of you have been thrown into a crisis as your jobs, careers, education, and even essential medical care and family relationships are threatened unless you submit to being injected with an unproven, experimental drug.

And with that announcement, many of us became second class citizens, stripped of basic rights, and have become the objects of legal discrimination, bullying and hateful comments, all because of our personal moral convictions and medical status.

I don't remember ever before a time when I have interacted with this many people whose lives have been so disrupted, filled with uncertainty, hopelessness and stress, as I have experienced in the past two weeks.

Where do you turn when those things you once relied upon grow unstable, begin collapsing and being stripped away, and you don't know what to do about it?

When you are facing situations in life that you don't understand, or when you are filled with questions that you can't answer, don't fix your eyes on the ever-changing unknown—fix your eyes on what you do know for sure, turn to that which will never change, and cling to that.

Don't be overwhelmed by fear of the unknown, but retreat to some solid ground and take your stand firmly upon that which cannot be shaken—cling to what you know for sure.

Probably more than almost any other passage of scripture Psalm 23 is what I pull up in my mind when I need something solid to cling to.

I can remember as a kid, walking home from hockey practices at night, often I would take a short-cut through a large empty, unlit field, and on some moonless nights my mind would begin imagining all kinds of evil creatures stalking me in the darkness.

And as the adrenaline began pumping, I have vivid memories of reciting the fourth verse, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me..."

And always the fear would subside and I would calm down as I began focusing on the truth that I am never alone—the Shepherd is always with me.

**Psalm 23:1**, begins with these words, “**The LORD is my shepherd...**”

First of all, we need to recognize that the Lord is not everyone’s shepherd. Only those who are His sheep can call the Lord their shepherd.

How do you get to belong to the Lord? How do you get the privilege of calling God your shepherd?

Psalm 23 follows Psalm 22, which is a prophetic Psalm describing the suffering of Jesus on the cross. **Psalm 22** opens with those words that Jesus cried out from the cross, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*”

The psalm goes on to describe the agonies of the cross in verses 6 to 21. For example, verse 16 reads, “*They pierced My hands and My feet; <sup>17</sup> I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. <sup>18</sup> They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.*”

Jesus first became like us, He became like a sheep, and died in our place. He purchased us with His own life, so that we might belong to Him.

But He won’t force us to come to Him, we must be willing to become one of His sheep.

If we will believe and receive what He did on the cross in our place, dying to pay the penalty for our sin, then we are invited to become one of His sheep and to start following Him as our shepherd with these words:

**Mark 8:34**, “*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*”

If you are a follower of Jesus, then this Psalm is for you. If you are not a follower of Jesus, then this Psalm is what you are missing out on.

And I pray that by the time we reach the end, you too will be drawn by God, to believe in Him, and choose to trust and follow the Shepherd.

**Psalm 23:1**, “**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**”

To *want*, is an old English expression that means to be in need.

This means that, because the Lord is our shepherd, we shall not lack anything that we need—no matter how difficult our situation becomes this is a guaranteed assurance—**we shall not lack anything that we need!**

A shepherd is fully devoted to meeting the needs of the sheep. Even if they take away your job and your home, and they won't let you buy groceries without a passport, the LORD, our shepherd, is committed to meeting all of your needs.

In **Matthew 6:31-33** Jesus says, “*Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*”

The Shepherd doesn't leave us to provide for ourselves, He provides for our needs. Trust Him, He will not fail; He will not change.

***Psalm 23:2, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”***

Sheep only lie down and relax when they are well-fed and content. When they lie down in a pasture it means they have eaten enough and are satisfied—they aren't wandering around looking for someplace better.

There is a saying that, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence,” which describes someone who is discontent with what they have and is always envying what other people have, thinking others are better off.

But when I am following the Good Shepherd, He makes me to lie down with contentment—He satisfies me with what He has provided.

It is His work in us to make us trust that He is providing that which is truly best for us.

***Philippians 4:11-13 NIV***, “*I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through [Christ] who gives me strength.*”

The enemy thinks that he is hurting us by taking away our employment, or taking away our freedoms. But God is going to use this to deliver us from trusting in things that are not reliable, and to teach us that Jesus really is all that we need.

***Psalm 73:25-26 NIV***, “*Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*”

I have shared with many of you before the prophecy that was spoken over me before I went to spend a year in discipleship ministry in the Philippines.

The prophecy said, “God is going to take you to the Philippines, and one by one He is going to strip away from you everything you have ever trusted in, until all you have left to hold onto is Jesus.

Then He is going to let the storms of life blow and beat against you until you have learned to trust that Jesus really is all that you need.”

God did that for me. I think I am probably due for a refresher course, but it is true, when everything else is taken away, having Jesus is enough.

**1 Timothy 6:6-9**, describes God’s plan for each of our lives—He is working through the stripping away of our affluence to accomplish this:

*“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich [those who desire other securities besides God] fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.”*

This is what our Shepherd is stripping away from us—only those things that He knows have been hurting us, and if left there, would destroy us.

**Psalm 23:3**, *“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”*

When our soul is in sorrow over a loss, our Shepherd revives us; when we are sinful, He sanctifies and changes us; when our soul is weak and prone to failure, He strengthens it. He provides us with all that is needed for life and godliness. He does it all!

He doesn’t leave us to work out our own problems, He ministers to us to restore us when we are weak, tired or have failed.

We don’t know the way, but He knows the way, so He leads us. And He will lead us only in right paths.

All of the paths He leads us on are for His name’s sake—meaning for the sake of His reputation and His glory—to make His name known, and trusted among the nations.

For a long time, many people around us haven’t even known about the awesome Good Shepherd that we have.

Their lives are a mess, and they are desperately struggling to try to make their lives work. But as far as they can see, we don’t have anything fundamentally different than they have.

This is one of the main reasons the Lord has us still living here on this sin cursed world—for His name’s sake—to make Him known among those who are lost and struggling, so that they might call upon His name and be saved.

Sometimes the Shepherd will lead us down a path that strips us of everything the world thinks is essential to happiness and security. And when they see that we continue to be joyful and secure, they will sit up and take notice and ask what do we have that gives us what their hearts long for?

The Lord has led you down that path for His name’s sake—so others would come to see Jesus as the source of life.

The big question is, will we follow Him down this path? Or will we bolt and run our own way?

***Psalm 23:4, “Yea, 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.”***

There are times when the Lord leads us out of that lush green pasture with peaceful waters, into a very undesirable and threatening place. But we trust that He has a God-glorifying purpose for bringing us here.

And because He is leading, look at how we can travel: “*Though I walk...*” I am not running in panic, or standing still, frozen in fear, but I calmly walk at a steady pace with God, all the way through the valley to the other side.

Notice that we do not walk through the valley of death, but the valley of the shadow of death, for the substance of death has been removed for us, and only the shadow of it remains.

Nobody needs to be afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop us, even for a moment.

The shadow of a wolf cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. (*Charles Spurgeon, Treasury of David, Vol. 1, p. 355*)

When we are following Jesus, all we encounter are the shadows, Jesus takes on the source of evil that is casting the shadow—including death—He conquered sin and death and all the powers of hell at the cross.

The Bible doesn’t say there will be no evil, but it says, “I will fear no evil; for Jesus the Shepherd is with me. Evil is there, casting its shadow over me, but it cannot harm me.

Therefore, I will fear no evil; for You are with me, You, Lord will take care of the evil, all I will ever experience is the shadow of it as it lunges at me, but You will strike it down before it reaches me.

**Psalm 91:7, 9**, “A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you...<sup>9</sup> Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place.”

The worst evils of life for a child of God are those which exist only in our imagination and cause us to fear when we should not.

When we fear instead of trusting, we will needlessly suffer the agony of death a thousand times in our mind. (*Ibid*)

**1Corinthians 15:54**, “Death is swallowed up in victory [the victory of Christ on the cross].<sup>55</sup> “O Death, where is your sting” O Hell, where is your victory” ...<sup>57</sup> thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Psalm 23:5**, “**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.**”

When we see our enemies gathering around us, and hostility and opposition increasing, our flesh response is to run away, maybe pack up our family and move to the mountains, or to Florida.

Or perhaps we start thinking of rationing our food.

But here is a picture of the Lord calmly setting out a feast for us, with the best tablecloth, dishes and all the trimmings, as though it were a peaceful and special occasion, and inviting us to sit down and eat.

And we eat and are nourished while surrounded by our enemies.

Times of opposition are not times for running away and seeking to hide from our enemies. Times of opposition are not when we cut back and rationing our spiritual nourishment.

We must not let the threats of the enemy stop us from gathering at the Lord’s banqueting table, even when the government uses laws to forbid it. The Lord wants us to gather and feast on the word of God, though the wolves are howling at the door.

The next line says, “**You anoint my head with oil ...**”

When a sheep had a wound, the shepherd would pour oil on the wound to help aid the healing process.

What if our doctors and hospitals won’t treat us without a passport?

The Lord is Jehovah Rophe, our physician, and He is a better physician than even the best human specialist.

**James 5:14-16**, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the [doctors? No, let him call for the] *elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.* <sup>15</sup> *And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.* **16** *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*

The last line of verse 5 says, “***my cup runs over.***”

This too is in the context of being in the presence of my enemies. My cup, refers to my level of satisfaction and fulfillment in life.

When we are following, and trusting the Good Shepherd our cup is never half empty or half full, but it is running over, even in the presence of our enemies.

**John 10:10 AMPC**, “*The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. [This is the context of the second half of the verse—in the presence of the thief] I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).*”

The only things that the enemy can take away from the child of God, are the things that hinder us from running well, and the things that come between us and God, and the things that can never really satisfy.

**Psalm 23:6**, “***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***”

This sentence can be interpreted to read, “Only goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...” (*Spurgeon, p. 356*)

Like two faithful companions who follow you everywhere you go, and never leave your side, goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins. (*Ibid*)

The Lord is good all the time. And He causes all things to work together for the good of those who are loved by Him. (Romans 8:28)

And when we fail, His abounding mercy does not treat us according to what our sins deserve.

***“... and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”***

This speaks of the certain hope of never-ending life after death in the presence of the Lord.

This is a reminder that this world is not our home—our Father’s house is our home. We are here on mission, but we have not been left here alone, God is always here with us—caring for us, guiding us, protecting us, as our shepherd, while we are on this mission.

For the New Testament believer, who has become the temple, or house, of the Holy Spirit, you have the Spirit of God living inside of you.

Therefore, while you are here on earth, you are at home with your God.

“Wherever we go, we’re home, because God is here in our soul.”

Where do you turn when those things you once relied upon grow unstable, begin collapsing and being stripped away, and you don’t know what to do about it?

When you are facing situations in life that you don’t understand, or when you are filled with questions that you can’t answer, don’t fix your eyes on the ever-changing unknown—fix your eyes on what you do know for sure, turn to that which will never change, and cling to that.

Don’t be overwhelmed by fear of the unknown, but retreat to some solid ground and take your stand firmly upon that which cannot be shaken—cling to what you know for sure.

Cling to the fact that the Lord is my shepherd; therefore, I shall never lack any good thing that I need.

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