

## Sunday, August 15, 2021 | Summer Baggage

### Week 2 | Psalm 23 | "Shepherded Through Fear"

#### Announcements:

- Recognize those who keep our facilities clean.
- Don't forget about our Church Picnic on Sunday, September 12.
- We are buying a house!

Summer Baggage is a three-week series that uncovers some of the heaviest weights we tend to carry around with us. These burdens can make life more challenging than it needs to be and often leads to more difficulties. In this study, we'll learn that if we leave our emotions to fester, it is only a matter of time before our luggage bursts open, leaving a mess in its wake.

Last week, we unpacked the first baggage, which was bitterness. We can never offend each other more than we have offended God. So if God's forgiveness is unending, so too should our forgiveness be without end. To excuse a bitter heart is to excuse one's self from the family of God. A community of the forgiven must be a forgiving community if we are to show the forgiveness of God to others.

Today, we're going to unpack the baggage of fear. The bible speaks a lot about fear. According to Rick Warren, the command "fear not" shows up no less than 365 times, one for each day of the year. Now, how exactly he came to that count, I do not know. However, what is clear is that "do not fear" is, in fact, the most repeated of all the commands.<sup>1</sup> And this is good because we are fearful creatures.

Chapman University tracks statistics on the widespread fears of the American people. According to their studies, the top three fears of 2019 were "Corrupt government officials," "Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes," and, lastly, "People I love becoming seriously ill."<sup>2</sup> Over half of the 1,219 people surveyed feared that they wouldn't have enough money for the future. Over a third are concerned that computers will replace people in the workforce. And interestingly enough, there were actually 113 people, roughly 9% of those surveyed, who also said they were "very afraid" of zombies. More people were afraid of zombies—a fictional monster—than a real-life animal like a dog, cat, or rat! Now, if this tells us anything, it tells us that the human

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Scotty, "A Prayer about God's Most Repeated Commands," October 3, 2011, The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/a-prayer-about-gods-most-repeated-command/>, [accessed, August 13, 2021].

<sup>2</sup> Sheth, Shreya, "America's Top Fears 2019," July 2019, *The Chapman University*, <https://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/research-centers/babbie-center/files/americas-top-fears-2019.pdf>, [accessed, August 13, 2021].

heart is not immune to fear, be it imaginary or factual. So, if we are predisposed to fear, what are we to do when we find that we are afraid? Go to the Scriptures.

**READ: Psalm 23 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

There are **two** principles that King David is trying to teach us.

**i. The Shepherd provides for His flock. (vs. 1-3)**

David begins this Psalm with a simple but profound statement:

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."*

God is not only **our** Shepherd; he is **my** Shepherd. The same One who provides for the community provides for the individual. The same One who protects the majority protects the minority. The same One who guides the people guides the person. What will I fear when the same Shepherd who leads the flock leads the sheep? If God delivered Israel, He will deliver me. If God loved the Church, He will love me. God cares as much for the One as He does for the many. What manner of love our Father has that so many would-be saved yet not one would be forgotten.

David uses two metaphors to describe what he means when he says he, like a sheep, "shall not want."

*"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."*

"Green pastures," as opposed to black pastures, implies grass that is luscious and full and ready to be eaten. It means that there is so much grass the sheep can graze till it's so full it has to "lie down."

Likewise, "still waters," as opposed to running waters, imply water that is calm and clear ready for drinking. It means a water source that the sheep can get right up "beside" it without fear of falling in.

And, what's the result of such a siesta? David says that the Shepherd "[restores my soul.](#)" Now, this restoration has two possible explanations. The first is that of a return, as in repentance. The idea being that the sheep, having wandered from the flock, has returned and been restored. The second explanation is that of revival, as in a renewal of the inner-most person ("soul"). I believe this latter explanation fits the context best as there is no indication that this sheep has been wayward. It seems more than the sheep having to be wearied from his travels, the sheep is revived by the Good Shepherd.

Having had the experience of walking with this Shepherd for some time, King David then makes a general observation. He says, "[He leads me in paths of righteousness....](#)" When he says "paths of righteousness," David isn't only expressing the idea that the Shepherd leads him onto the moral high ground; instead, he's also expressing the idea that the Shepherd will simply lead him on the right paths. Thus, even when there doesn't seem to be a clear right or wrong direction to go, the Shepherd will guide him, the sheep, in the so-called "gray areas." Thus, even when the way before David seemed ambiguous and enigmatic, he was able to move ahead rather than be petrified with indecision.

But why does the Good Shepherd do this? Is it because He loves the sheep? Well, yes, we could make an argument for that using other passages of Scripture. However, this is not the reason David gives as to why the Shepherd does all this good on behalf of the sheep. The reason David gives us is that the Shepherd leads him "[for his \[the Shepherds\] name's sake.](#)"

The Shepherd does what he does because his name is publicized. He receives glory, honor, and praise when he provides for his sheep. The care he gives his flock speaks not to the virtue of the sheep but the shepherd. Sheep are dumb animals prone to wander. And they are easy pickings for predators. Thus, should a sheep be so contented that they literally lie down in the middle of the wilderness to take a nap, it is the Shepherd's work and wisdom that is deserving of praise.

This leads us to the next principle David wanted us to know about this Shepherd: the Good Shepherd not only provides for His flock, but He also protects His flock.

## **ii.     The Shepherd protects His flock. (vs. 4-6)**

Unlike farming in the West, where there are acres upon acres of rich ground for sheep to graze, shepherding in the East meant wandering vast swaths of land in search of food and water. And often, the best places to look for a steadily flowing brook or lush green grass was in the crags and crevices of a ravine. Like a gutter, water tends to flow down and collects in gullies. And because it is protected from the arid atmosphere in Israel there, the water sprouts vegetation.

Thus, everything a healthy sheep needs to survive (i.e., water and vegetation) is found in the most dangerous place for a sheep to be: a valley. Why is it the most dangerous place for a sheep to be? Predators. Just as a sheep is drawn to the chasm searching for food and water, so too is the sheep-killer; and while their water source is the same, their appetites are very different.

But how does our sheep, King David, respond in such a precarious situation? “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...*” Though David could be hedged about by darkness and danger on all sides, he tells us that he fears no evil. Why? Because he's one of those combat sheep suited up with armor, claws, and fangs? No. He's as helpless as any sheep. His confidence is not in himself but in the Shepherd. He says, “*...for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*”

David says he will not fear even a valley filled with death because he does not walk that kind of valley alone. The Shepherd is with him. The Good Shepherd has not abandoned him. The presence of the Shepherd is enough to dispel his fears even though he feels the gaze of hungry predators lurking in the shadows.

Why is the presence of the Shepherd enough to dispel such fear? Because the Good Shepherd is armed. He has a “rod” and a “staff.” A Palestinian shepherd carried these instruments for two drastically different reasons. The rod was used for defense, whereas the staff was used for direction. Meaning, should one of the sheep be attacked by some predator, the shepherd would rush in and defend the sheep with a short but thick stick, what we might refer to as a cudgel. However, if one sheep goes in the wrong direction, the shepherd would use a long sturdy “staff” to gently but firmly prod the sheep to go in the other direction. What's interesting is that the former was never used on the latter. The shepherd never disciplined with the intent of maiming or killing the sheep. He always punished to save the sheep.

And what's the result of such defense and direction? David tells us that they “comfort” him. When you trust the presence of the Shepherd so unequivocally that you will not panic when surrounded by enemies, the result is security, not insecurity.

In fact, David is so secure that even when the Shepherd prepares “*a table before [him] in the presence of [his] enemies,*” he will not fear but will be honored. So much so that the Shepherd will “*anoint [his] head with oil*” and fill his cup till it “*overflows.*”

Now, admittedly, it seems that David has shifted his metaphor of a Shepherd and His sheep to that of a Host and His guest. After all, what sheep have ever eaten a table,

been anointed with oil, or given a cup to drink. But the correlation between the two analogies remains clear. Just as the sheep are led into dangerous situations (i.e., a valley of death), so too will the followers of God be led into dangerous situations (i.e., a table of enemies). Nevertheless, the follower of God will be honored (“anoint”) with overabundance (“overflows”) like a sheep lying down to take a nap with a full belly and quenched thirst amid a deep dark valley. Often we tend to think of the “righteous paths” as only a way of plenty and peace. But a “valley of the shadow of death” and a table prepared “in the presences of mine enemies” is no less or more than the “righteous paths” than “green pastures” and “still waters.” In fact, the very place where we will find that our needs are provided for is also in the same place where we will find we need the most protection. Hidden within a ravine of darkness, there is grass and a brook. Hidden amongst a banquet with enemies, there is honor and plenty. The scariest place on the earth is found to be in the center of God’s will; yet, paradoxically, the One who finds themselves in the center of God’s will also be fearless in the face of such opposition. Why? Because that person knows they are not alone. After all, he is not alone. The Shepherd is with them.

David closes his Psalm by making a generalized statement about a life that is wholly dependent upon the Shepherd’s provision and protection. He says, “[Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.](#)” Those who follow the Good Shepherd will find that goodness and mercy follow them. And not just follow but pursue them. And when that sheep has come to the end of its life, it will not go off into oblivion to be forgotten, but will “dwell” with the Shepherd, that is “forever.”

So, what’s the takeaway?

The presence of the Good Shepherd dispels every kind of fear.

God told Jacob, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Gen. 28:15) Later, he would tell his son Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.” (Gen. 48:21) God told Moses, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Ex. 33:14) God told Joshua that, “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.” (Josh. 1:5) God told Isaiah the Prophet, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off, fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isa. 41-9-10) Jesus said to his disciples that, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)

## Video Description

Summer Baggage | Week 2 | “Shepherding Through Fear”

TEXT: Psalm 23

David, in Psalm 23, summed up the solution to fear: **the presence of the Good Shepherd dispels every kind of fear.** This is a thread that is interwoven throughout Scripture. For instance, God told Jacob, “Behold, I am **with you** and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Gen. 28:15) Later, he would tell his son Joseph, “I am about to die, but **God will be with you** and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.” (Gen. 48:21) God told Moses, “My presence will go **with you**, and I will give you rest.” (Ex. 33:14) God told Joshua that, “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be **with you**. I will not leave you or forsake you.” (Josh. 1:5) God told Isaiah the Prophet, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off, **fear not, for I am with you**; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isa. 41-9-10) And, of course, Jesus said to his disciples, “I am **with you always**, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)

The Good Shepherd has not abandoned us. His presence is enough to dispel our fears. Even though we may feel the gaze of hungry predators lurking in the shadows, even though we may be seated at a table surrounded by enemies, we do not have to fear because the Shepherd is with us.

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: